Anachronism

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Anachronism

by ihaveaproblem_jpeg

Summary

Anachronism: (noun) a thing belonging or appropriate to a period other than that in which it exists.

Jenova sought to have its perfect weapon. A vessel. A son to act alongside it in the conquering of the cosmos. Through many, many years of waiting, that's *exactly* what it got. However, there's one thing it didn't account for. The innate human instinct to protect what they care about, and the planets innate love for what belongs to Her.

And that just may be what changes anything.

or; Sephiroth and Zack travel through time during the scene in the reactor, have no idea what they're supposed to fix, and somehow end up making things better anyways out of sheer, dumb luck.

Notes

Updates every Monday, multiple times a week if necessary. Comments are welcome and appreciated!

Sephiroth - The Beginning

Chapter Summary

sephiroth's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

Chapter Notes

longest fic i've written in a long while. most of it's prewritten, so the chapter count will change once i've finished the last few chapters. updates every week, probably on mondays. the early few chapters are a bit rough but i do get my act together around like, 4-5, so. yeah. chapters will average 3 pages (~1200 words) so if i think it's not enough content i may update multiple times. summaries will be where i unload bad jokes about the chapter, probably

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He seeks to hurt me- hurt us! Defeat him, my son!

Up until that point, his mind had been fogged over, like frosted glass in a blizzard. All he could feel was a strange warmth enveloping his being in what must have been a motherly hug - after all, She was his Mother. She had first spoken with him not too long ago, told him of what the townspeople had tried to do to Her.

It didn't matter now. They were gone and Mother was safe. He should listen to Her, get rid of this-

Pain lances through his mind as something deep, *deep* inside his soul denies this. He couldn't hurt Zack, and Zack would never hurt *him.*

So why…?

Defeat him, eliminate him, take him down! He seeks to stop us - to kill us!

She speaks again, and the pain comes back. “You must be mistaken! He would never hurt me, Mother! He would never hurt you!” He begs. Though his mind is fogged, so consumed by his Mother’s love he can hardly consider a thing else, his *soul* knows that Zack would *never* .

He shall betray you just as those others did! Do you not see how he fights you? How he tries to slay you even now?

The thought of Zack - kind Zack, the charming puppy - trying to *kill* him draws his attention to the ongoing battle. When did he start fighting?

He doesn’t know.

Before his sword can hit what’s sure to be a debilitating, if not deadly, strike, he draws back. “Zack…? What- I don’t…”

It's just a moment until he’s provided with an answer. “Seph! …You’re yourself again, right? Not going to try and burn down more towns?” Zack pauses, breathing heavily.

My son! He’s trying to trick you, to ruin you! Kill him now!

“He won’t, Mother. We can… trust him.” He pleads, barely managing to get it out around the fog and the pain and the sheer, utter *confusion.* Just what happened? He burned down a *town?* Are the people alright?

When his knees buckle under him as his mind flares in agony, Zack catches him before he can hit the ground. “Woah now, don’t go hurting yourself. I’m guessing you’re talking to that… lady up there?”

That lady? Is he talking about Mother? The moment the thought crosses his mind, the pain worsens. He can *hear* Her screaming at him, telling him to take down Zack, but… he can't bring himself to even consider the thought. How could he *ever* hurt him, the one person who has stuck with him through everything. Who *continues* to help him even though he apparently *burned down a town.*

The boy has always been unflinchingly loyal to the people he cares about. Up until the man's last breath, he never wanted to hurt Angeal. Even despite everything he did, he was still willing to try and help Genesis because *Sephiroth* wanted his friend back.

Slay him, my son! Kill-

No . He won't hurt Zack. Even if it means he has to defy her.

The pain recedes for a moment, and he can vaguely make out that the boy's trying to say something to him, but before he can respond or even *attempt* to decipher what he's saying a wave of agony crashes down on every fiber of his being. He thinks he's screaming.

He can't tell.

Between the pain, he reaches for Zack. He needs something to ground him, something he *knows.* Someone he holds so very dear to his heart. The boy reaches back, and he shakily buries his face in his shoulder. Mother screams with rage, the pain ebbing and flowing as her presence weakens and strengthens and weakens again.

It's like being torn in half.

“Shit, Seph! Breathe with me, man. What’s wrong?”

He gasps, barely managing to choke something out. “Mother won’t- I don't want to- *hurts-”* It’s barely coherent, but Zack seems to get the gist of it. “She’s doing this to you?” He nods. That’s all he can do, at this point.

The warm arms that are the only things separating him from oblivion vanish for a moment. In that moment, her screams of rage turn into ones of agony and the pain *finally* soothes down into something more manageable.

A glance to the side shows the buster sword pierced straight through the glass, straight through *Mother*. Strangely enough, he doesn’t mind as much as he thought he would.

Zack rushes back down to him, pulling him back into his arms. “You feeling any better, bud? Thought it would be easiest to just… take the direct route.”

Humming, he watches the trails of mako on the side of the reactor as they climb up the walls. He doesn’t think he has the energy to do much more, honestly.

Wait.

Mako shouldn’t be…

The boy seems to have noticed something too. “Hey, Seph? Is it just

me or is the mako coming towards us? Really fast?"

He doesn't wait for an answer, going to pick Sephiroth up and carry him outside. He barely manages a few steps before his legs buckle underneath him. "Dammit. Just my luck. Hey, how much do you wanna bet it's after the uh… thing in the tank? I hope it's after the thing in the tank."

A few of the trails *do* break off to surround Mother, but the majority of them continue their approach until they're fully surrounded. Once that happens, they reach up and start to *pull* at something inside them, each touch to their skin seeming to sink deep within their bones, leeching the last of their energy away.

The last thing Sephiroth hears before succumbing to their gentle touch is Zack cursing under his breath.

The next thing he sees is the fading form of the Ifrit summon, slayed by his blade. The hushed ambiance of the Wutai jungle is the next thing he notes, and it's only then that his mind lurches into awareness. He *remembers* this. It's when Angeal defected and *abandoned* him and Zack.

The name is on the tip of his tongue as he snaps around, and there the boy is, pulling himself shakily onto his feet. Though his body is the mere sixteen it was during the mission, the eyes that meet his own are anything but.

"Zackary. What's the last thing you remember?"

Whatever this is - a hallucination caused by the mako or, by some *unimaginable* twist of fate, the real, *genuine* past, he needs to know if he's alone.

Please, don’t let me be alone, he prays to the Planet in a hushed whisper.

“Nibelheim. Seph, what *happened?”*

Chapter End Notes

the only comment i have on this one is that i threw canon out the window the second i could. and yeah, that's pretty much what happened.

Sephiroth - Plans

Chapter Summary

sephiroth might be drafting murder plans on angeal. depends.

Chapter Notes

chapters should average 2 sephiroth to 1 zack, with mystery guest appearances every now and then. this format WILL change depending on how the story demands it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They spend a few minutes trying to figure out what's going on. The last thing the both of them remember happening is the mako, and then they were suddenly two years in the past with no real explanation.

"It doesn't *seem* like a hallucination. This is all definitely real." Zack points out, and he nods in quiet agreement. "That means that Angeal is still alive! Seph, we could save him!"

They could. The opportunity is well in their hands, and although it might have been far easier prior to his defection, this is the next best thing.

"We don't know where they went for the first month Angeal was gone. It gives us time to prepare ourselves." When he points it out, Zack nods in excitement. There's a spark in his eyes again, one that had been lost when his mentor died. By making Zack kill him.

The thought anchors itself in Sephiroth's mind. Under *no* circumstances will he ever let his dearest friend be hurt by Angeal again.

“Say, how are we going to explain the fact that we’re suddenly best buds? For all everyone else knows, we *just* met not too long ago. The Turks would definitely think something’s weird. Also, should we *tell* anyone else?” Zack questions, tilting his head to the side.

He nods. “All reasonable concerns. For now, if anyone asks, play it as us sticking together after the sudden loss of Genesis and Angeal. I took you under my wing because I was concerned you might do something rash to find your mentor.” Most people don’t tend to ask questions where he’s concerned though. It’s little more than a formality.

Sometimes, being considered unapproachable has its benefits.

“In regards to telling anyone… not for now. Maybe once we’ve fixed things.”

The puppy gives a thumbs up, and they begin making their way back to the helicopter. Wutai has nothing left for them now.

Other than the strange looks here and there from the confused flight crew when he lets Zack fall asleep on his shoulder, the ride back goes smoothly. He tells Director Lazard his report during the trip, only pausing here and there so that Zack stays comfortable.

It’s only once he’s finished giving the report that the Director manages to ask what’s going on. “You aren’t usually so… forthcoming with your personal space. I would have expected you to be even more distant than usual, honestly, especially considering everything that happened.”

“I wouldn’t blame you for it, Director. It’s just that… Angeal left him there *alone* to fight a powerful summon. How could I not want to be there for Zack while he processes things? It might do us both some

good to have a companion while trying to figure out what happened." He glances to the side. Hopefully that's a good enough explanation.

Zack would probably have put it better. The boy has a talent for talking, much more than he does. Had it not been for Genesis and Angeal, he would talk even *less* than he does now.

With only the sound of the helicopter filling the silence, his mind is drawn back to the events in Nibelheim. Mother had insisted that Zack was going to hurt him, yet… he *knows* that would only ever be his last resort.

For the first time, he finds himself wondering what *exactly* happened after running into Genesis at the reactor. The memories are foggy at *best,* and the most he can manage to recall is Mother whispering in his ear, telling him what had *seemed* to be the truth at the time.

He doubts it to be the truth now. Everything just seems to be… *off*.

The plaque above the door held the name of his mother… according to Hojo. But the thing contained inside *couldn't* be human. Despite appearances, despite the rage and despair that had consumed his mind so *easily* when he could barely think past the fog … Sephiroth has no doubts that he's human.

Zack constantly reminds him of that fact. That despite all his earliest memories being centered around the labs, that doesn't make him any different from everyone else.

If that's the case, then what *happened?* He heard Moth… *Jenova's* voice, and then suddenly he was fighting Zack, burning down villages, doing things he'd *never* have done if he was of a sound mind. Was she controlling him? The first coherent thing he can remember is *begging*

her to understand that Zack would never hurt either of them.

Then it was *painful.* It *hurt* to resist her.

It's a miracle he didn't think something was off about it sooner. How could he have ever willingly let the thought cross his mind that *Hojo* of all people would actually tell him the truth?

Well. Now that he knows, he can scour the files until he finds everyone connected to that *'Jenova Project'.* Perhaps he'll find his mothers name, or his origins. Maybe he was kidnapped at birth? Or surrendered for science? Despite the… lacking positive options, his mind buzzes with excitement.

He can get to know about his *mother.* His *real* mother, not some strange being unearthed from a crater (that's most likely not an Ancient. As Zack would put it, that purple-blue veiny mass is *not* an ancestor to humanity). If she's still alive, that is.

The question of his mother inevitably brings up the question of his father. Which parent does he look like more? Who *is* his father? Despite Hojo constantly insisting that he was the man's son, he… doubts it.

He would be significantly uglier if that was the case.

The thoughts trail off as they make their landing back in Midgar. Zack, who's *somehow* still dead asleep, is unceremoniously thrown onto his couch barely five minutes later. The Director insisted that he take the day off tomorrow, and considering the two of them need time to figure out what to do next he finds himself thankful for the man.

He takes the time to shower and change into something more comfortable before sitting down and waiting for the puppy to wake up.

It doesn't take long. The moment he starts moving, a signal jammer is turned on. This isn't a discussion he wants Hojo (or the Turks) overhearing.

"Wh- huh? Seph…? What's goin' on?" Zack grumbles, shifting so that he's sitting up.

Sephiroth smiles slightly. "We have to figure out what to do next. We have plenty of opportunity to change the past, but we can't do that without knowing *what* we both deem necessary to change."

A nod. "Oh, yeah, right. We should figure out what the hell happened to you at the reactor."

"Definitely. Hojo and Hollander need to die."

"Oh, tota- *what?* I mean, I don't really *blame* you, but… why?" The boy blinks at him, and sometimes it is *blatantly* obvious where the puppy nickname came from. He tilts his head to the side. "Both of them were complicit in human experimentation. It's entirely possible that Hojo had something to do with what happened at Nibelheim as well." This sort of thing is *exactly* his style.

Zack nods again. "I see. We should talk to Aerith at some point! She's a Cetra, so… probably knows something about that Jenova lady."

What?

He contemplates for a moment, and then decides that this is really the sort of thing he should be expecting from Zack by now. Of *course* his girlfriend is one of the Ancients. Who were thought *extinct*. However… “Would she know you at this point in time?”

The boy purses his lips and glances to the side. “I uh… forgot about that part. We only met after Angeal threw me off the plate, so… I mean…” Zack pauses for a moment, before brightening. “It’s still worth a shot! She *knows* things.”

Sephiroth finds there to be *many* things wrong with what Zack just said. Angeal *what?* Is that why the boy went missing for a few hours after the invasion at Headquarters?

With a sigh, he shuffles over and pulls Zack into a hug. The kind he’s seen the boy give to that… Cloud boy from the infantry. It’s… comforting. He never realized how *nice* it was to hold someone close, to feel their warmth wash over you. Genesis and Angeal never did this with him.

It’s nice.

Chapter End Notes

i will stop abusing the enter tool later on i swear there will be paragraphs at some point

Zack - Vague Melancholy

Chapter Summary

> It takes time to adjust to things, and, really, considering the situation they're in?
>
> Not much of a surprise.

Chapter Notes

> if the formatting looks weird compared to the first two chapters thats bc i had to paste it on my phone

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the hug comes, Zack freezes for a moment before melting into it. Who knew Sephiroth was such a good hugger? Not him!

He pulls the General close, and he halfheartedly notices himself curling into the man the same way he used to when his dad would hug him. Sephiroth reminds him a *lot* of his dad, actually, minus the whole… burned down a town and then traveled through time *thing*. Well, actually, his dad *is* a pretty weird guy… but he's from Gongaga, so…

The whole issue with Nibelheim feels so far away now. He never blamed the man for what happened, there's no way in *hell* Sephiroth would ever do *that* of his own free will, so it's just… easy to separate himself from the entire thing.

"Man, you give *great* hugs."

The man in question chuckles. "I hope so. I learned from the best." A momentary pause. "The jammer is going to run out of power soon. It's best we stall our discussion here."

Humming, he nods. "Probably. So… find Aerith and go from there?"

Sephiroth pulls away. "If you think it best. You… are you going to let go anytime soon? I am… unaware as to the average duration of hugs." Zack blinks, then jerks away. How long has he been hugging him? Is he upset? Does he think that he's weird now? Oh *man,* Angeal's gonna-

…right.

“Sorry man, uh… hope you didn’t mind too much!” He says, waving his hands in a panic.

A laugh. “It’s fine.” A quiet beep from the table, and his eyes thin. With the way the two of them probably look to the cameras right now, anyone watching would likely assume they were talking about Angeal. “You can stay the night, if you wish. I understand if you would rather not… be alone right now. There’s a spare room down the hall.”

That… would be nice. He doesn’t want to leave Seph alone after all of this. It’s probably the same for the General, too. “Yeah, I will. Thanks for… everything. You didn’t have to be this nice to me.”

It’s not *too* specific, so Sephiroth will understand what he means and anyone listening in will probably think it has something to do with the desertion. Turns out he *did* pick something up from his Turk friends after all!

“Yet I did so anyway. Go to bed, Zackary. I’ll be here in the morning.”

The way to the spare bedroom is one he knows by heart. It wasn’t uncommon before Nibelheim for him to stay in the Generals apartment, to the point that when someone needed to find him it’d be the first place they checked. Still, he makes sure to look like he’s never stepped foot in the apartment before.

Pretty much the instant he lays down on that familiar-but-not bed, he’s dead asleep.

It’s not often he remembers his dreams, and it turns out that this is going to be no different. Vague impressions of *green,* whispering voices, the whole nine yards, really. Dad called ‘em the truest method of telling if someone was a Fair or not. Everyone in Gongaga had dreams like that before the Reactor came and stole their ‘greenblood’, if Nana Neith was to be believed.

And everyone believes Nana Neith, so… yeah. Maybe that’s something he should mention to Seph, actually. The guy knows a lot about science, so if there’s anyone to ask about the dreams and ‘greenblood’ (that part never made sense to him, honestly) it’d probably be him.

He stumbles his way into the kitchen, rubbing blearily at his eyes. Why does it have to be that his mind wakes up super easily, but it takes a thousand years for him to be ready for the day?

A hand ruffles his hair in greeting as a dish of… *something…* is slid in front of him. The smell of Sephiroth's cooking wakes him up quicker than any coffee (which he's banned from having after the *incident),* and he's digging in before he can even remember the fact that the two of them are in the past.

Oh yeah. They're in the past.

He eats another spoonful or two of hashbrowns before the thought registers. The memories of their planning the night before come rushing in. *Aerith.*

A glance to the side shows that Sephiroth is methodically eating his food, only the slight tightness at the corners of his eyes to show for his similarly inclined thoughts. He goes back to his food after a moment. It's not as though the world's ending, especially with them here to fix things now.

Zack deserves to finish these hashbrowns before having any more important thoughts. He'll tell Sephiroth about the dreams and stuff when they go to meet Aerith. Maybe he'll tell her too, in case she knows anything about it. Which she probably will.

It's only an hour or two later that they manage to get out into the slums. A few excuses, a little bit of taking advantage of the fact that the company is willing to do damn near anything to keep him and Seph from deserting, and they've got the next week or so off.

"Seriously, that guy looked like he was gonna faint when you walked in! You are *not* scary, I really don't know what about you made him like that!" He laughs, glancing at the man. Sephiroth is staring at the conditions of the slums with narrowed eyes.

He won't be surprised if Urban Development suddenly starts on cleanup attempts within the next couple days. Seph is just like that.

They'd considered for a moment trying to disguise themselves, especially considering the Turk watch on Aerith, but… there really is no hiding the General. Even if they managed it *this* time, any subsequent visits would honestly just make them suspicious.

No one paid any attention to whatever Zack did before Angeal's defection, so, if things go right, they can just play it off as him and Aerith having met before.

Whether the Turks believe that is another question, *but* it'll give them a cover story. If everything goes right.

He really hopes she remembers him.

Contrary to what some may believe may have happened were someone as famous as *the* Silver General to come down into the slums, few people offer either of them a second glance. The most they get is a few children who ask a couple questions and then run back to their homes.

Every time he's ignored Sephiroth's mood seems to lighten. He can only assume how nice it must be, when you haven't had a moment to truly be the same as everyone else in your entire life. To be ignored, even for a bit… It must be an amazing feeling.

When the church comes into sight, the man freezes and holds a hand to his chest. It's as though he doesn't even know he's doing it.

"There's something strange about it. Why do I feel *scared?"*

He glances at him. "Maybe it's Jenova. There might be something about this place that she doesn't like."

"Then," Sephiroth frowns, glancing up at the steeples. "It may be the only place I will be free."

Zack hums. There's really no way of telling one way or the other. In the end, it's merely a matter of taking that first step and letting the rest come to you.

"We should head inside."

Chapter End Notes

> things are going to start getting rapidly more interesting from here! i pretty much wrote this fic entirely to have a time travel fic where zack was a central character. and also a few other self indulgent things.

zacks povs generally turn out to be the ones where i stare at my hands in a fearful awe. but theres some time til those start up. fics shaping up to be about 34 chapters, so ive (hopefully) only got a couple left and then updates will be more frequent

Sephiroth - Revelation

Chapter Summary

Sephiroth and Zack meet Aerith, and then conversations are had.

Chapter Notes

from here the plot will definitely start to get a bit more active, because it's around this point i actually wrote an outline for plot points i wanted to get to

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first sight of Aerith is one that Sephiroth believes he will never forget. Perhaps it is because the faint light bleeding through the plate lands atop her *just so.* Perhaps it is because of the marvelous patch of flowers she kneels upon.

Either way, something in him screams at the sight of her. Something else rejoices.

“I was wondering when you two would come. It didn’t take as long as I thought it would.” She says, glassy green (as emeralds, as mako, no, as the *lifestream)* eyes dancing across both of their forms. “She told me you would come. That against all odds you managed to tear yourself from the Calamities control. That she brought you both back to prevent the end.”

Her eyes clear up after a moment. “Enough of that, I think. It’s nice to meet you both, in this timeline! I’m Aerith Gainsborough. Want a flower?”

He takes the flower. Sephiroth is *overwhelmingly* confused, though Zack doesn’t appear to be phased. This must be what he meant, then. That she *knows* things. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Aerith. I am Sephiroth.”

Pausing for a moment, he then asks, “What did you mean by *Calamity?”*

She turns towards them in full. It shocks him, for a moment, to see her face. It’s familiar, almost the same as the one he sees in the mirror everyday. Why do they look so similar?

“Jenova. The Crisis from the Skies. The Calamity. The end of times. The Planet has a lot of names for it, and I’ve only been able to start hearing them recently. You needn’t worry, though. In bringing you back She severed the connection between you, rekindling the one you should have had to Her through your heritage.”

…What the *hell* does she mean by that?

Zack nods as though this all makes sense. “I guess I’m not really surprised that Jenova isn’t a Cetra. Didn’t… *feel* like you.”

Sephiroth blinks for a moment, and then finally decides to ask his question. The other two don’t really seem like they’re going to explain anything. “...What exactly do you mean by that? I am… lacking in knowledge.” Furthermore, what did Zack mean by *feel?*

Aerith laughs. “I should’ve expected that. Your mother- your *real* mother, was Lucretia Crescent. My mom’s sister. So you’re a Cetra, like me.”

Silence.

“I can’t say that really surprises me. You two look *really* similar. Make Sephiroth’s hair brown and you could practically be siblings.” Zack points out. It’s a reasonable conclusion. One that he’d made himself.

He glances at Aerith. “What you said… Jenova blocked my connection to the planet? Is that why it never spoke to me sooner?”

“She. You’re right, too. It… got in the way, I think? She wasn’t really detailed with that part. Either way, the issue’s been fixed. If you feel weird the next couple days that’s just…” She trails off for a moment, eyes blank, before continuing. “Just the Planet neutralizing the last of It’s influence on your genetics. If you’ve ever wondered what your natural hair color is, you’re gonna find out!”

Hm. Alright then. He *has* wondered that in the past, in most part because that one picture of his mother that he’d seen all those years ago was in black and white. Maybe it’s the same brown Aerith has?

While he thinks it over, fiddling with some of his hair (an action completely abnormal to him), she and Zack chat a bit.

She grins. “You look like you’re *dying* to ask a question, Zack. Feel free to ask Aerith, the all-knowing steward of the Planet!”

Laughing, the puppy smiles. “So like, I don’t actually know how to explain this, but… Have you ever heard of the term *‘greenblood’?* Nana Neith said the reactors stole it from a lot of the old families in Gongaga. Also, are dreams about the color green and whispering voices normal? I know these are pretty weird questions, but I thought of them earlier and at this point I’m *really* curious-”

Aerith slaps a hand over his mouth and shushes him, grinning from ear to ear. “Have I heard the term? Oh I have *heard it,* alright! Here I

was, thinking I was the last Cetra, and now suddenly two of them come waltzing into my church!"

The boy looks at him and blinks for a moment. He blinks back.

Really, now. He'd thought the revealing of *his* heritage to be the most eventful thing to happen today. "It's always you. Why is it always you?" He asks, astonished. Something *always* happens with Zack around. To quote Genesis from a mission gone *very wrong* , ' *the boy is cursed.'*

"I'm- huh? *What?* Wh…? Really? You're not… but… huh?" Zack questions eloquently once she extracts her hand.

While the boy sputters, he turns to look at Aerith (his *cousin!* He has a *family!)* . She shrugs. He shrugs back, another action that's completely *unlike* him, yet also feels so much more *right* than it might've been just a few days prior. Sephiroth feels freer than he ever has.

Is it because of the elimination of the Jenova cells held inside of him? Were *those* the reason he never felt human? The reason he always felt like he was tied down by chains?

He can't bring himself to mind that they're gone.

It takes a good five or so minutes for Zackary to calm down enough to form a coherent sentence. "So… we're all Cetra? Also, are we *sure* this is the best place to be having this conversation?"

Right, the Turks tend to hang around Aerith if what the boy said earlier was true. She shrugs. "It's fine. If anything, they're just going

to be surprised for a bit. It's been a long time since anyone entertained the thought of there being anyone left other than me."

Sephiroth tilts his head, considering. "Is there a chance of them attempting to detain us, then?"

"Not if they don't want to die. They'll probably try to encourage me and Zack to get together though, since they're gonna want more Ancients and we're not related." When Aerith clarifies that, he finds himself narrowing his eyes in concern. She waves him off. "I can take care of myself, don't worry."

He doesn't doubt that.

A glance at his PHS tells him that it's getting late. "Would you like an escort home? I'm aware that the slums can be… dangerous." And he doesn't want to leave her just yet. She's the first family that he's ever met. Potentially the *only* family he's ever going to meet.

She smiles at them both. "Of course! And you can meet my mom. She's not my birth mother, but… she's still family. I think she'd love to meet you both."

That's enough for him. The trek back to her house is quiet, not a single disturbance.

Both him and Zack freeze when they see the sheer amount of *life* surrounding them once they step through the threshold. The wind tickles his ear, whispering something he can't quite make out. Sephiroth can tell that both Zack and himself relax at the gently rushing of the water, the whistle of the breeze through the flowers.

It’s like coming home.

A woman greets them as they approach the door. “Aerith, there you-…and who might these two be?”

His cousin smiles at her. “This is my cousin Sephiroth, and my… hm… My boyfriend, Zack.”

Chapter End Notes

> the cetra zack thing came about because I always thought it was kinda weird that he acted in a similar manner to aerith in advent children. then i read some text in ff7 rebirth that stated that gongaga was settled by the cetra a long time ago, and have been riding that high since. more people need to make fics where zack is a cetra

Sephiroth - LOVELESS

Chapter Summary

Sephiroth and Zack have a discussion about poetry.

Chapter Notes

ah yes the almighty yapping chapter. i am the supreme lord of yap haha

anyways i have officially finished the fanfic (as you may have noticed by the finalized chapter count) so ill start updating at least twice a week on mondays and fridays. maybe more often. it really depends on if i remember to do it beyond the days i have alarms set for

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Elmyra, who introduces herself while ushering the three of them in, smiles thinly at them both. Had he been anyone else, he might have shivered under her gaze. As he is now, he holds it. Barely. Zack, on the other hand…

The boy is subject to far worse, on account of his newly crowned position as boyfriend. Perhaps that's what they were discussing earlier?

Mrs. Gainsborough seems to find something about him that makes her relax, and when she looks away Sephiroth notes that the boy immediately starts thanking the Planet. Really, it's not as though she was going to *kill* him. It would've made Aerith sad.

Hm. Perhaps, as her cousin, he should give the boy a hard time. That *is* what family is supposed to do, isn't it?

Zack's betrayed expression when he turns his *own* glare onto him

makes Aerith snort. “Come on, mom, Sephiroth. Stop messing with him! You’re scaring the puppy.” When the boy's eyes land on her his expression drops into one that’s… lovesick? Would that be a good descriptor of the way the entire world seems to be pushed aside when Zack is faced with Aerith?

What it must be like, to fall in love. One can only wonder.

“You two won’t be staying long, will you?” Elmyra asks. He shakes his head. “No. We ought to be heading back ourselves. Here are mine and Zack’s numbers. Call us if either of you need anything.”

The puppy chimes in. “We’ll be back to visit soon!”

With that, they make their way back to the upper plate. The slums are no place for his cousin to live, not in their current state anyways, so he will… *inquire* as to why they are so underdeveloped. Perhaps he will put in a word to Director Tuesti. That man has always been more agreeable than the rest of the board.

It’s on the train that Zack starts talking. “You know… I really wasn’t expecting all of *that.* It’s strange to think about how we would’ve never learned any of this if we hadn’t been brought back.”

He hums. “Certainly. I’ve already noticed some changes in my behavior. It makes me wonder… just *how much* of what I believed to be myself was really a product of the Jenova cells?” Was anything he thought he knew about himself true? Is his mother really dead? Did what he believed to be Hojo’s *one* moment of kindness turn out to be just another lie?

“I’d say that’s up to you to decide. You’re still *yourself,* after all. There’s only so many ways that your body can influence who you

are."

Laughing, he glances at the boy. "You can be fairly wise when you put your mind to it, Zack."

"I'm *always* wise." A grin.

The silence is more comfortable, after that. They make their way back to Sephiroth's apartment, only a few strange glances here and there from SOLDIERS on the lower floors of the building. "Wonder what rumors they're making up about us." The puppy asks, tilting his head. It's easy to act as though Angeal's loss is weighing down on them. It always was, even back in the past where they'd had months to cope with it.

Unlike Genesis, who'd been… *confrontational* at best, Angeal had never been anything short of kind to the two of them.

That doesn't mean Sephiroth is happy that Genesis is gone, no- sometimes he can swear he hears those playful insults on the wind, a Loveless quote tickling the hairs on the back of his neck. The whisper of fire as it blows past his head.

"Even if the morrow is barren of promises…" He whispers, feeling the tilt of the words atop his tongue just as surely as he knows his own name. One of the man's favorite lines.

"Nothing shall forestall my return. Loveless act five. Are you thinking about something?" Zack, unexpectedly, finishes. He shrugs. "I suppose. It's… strange. You'd expect us to be coming back to prevent a terrible future, but… we don't quite know what that future is. It never had the chance to come to pass."

The puppy closes the door behind them as they step into the apartment. He makes sure to flick on the jammer, though they were quiet enough in the halls that nothing would be picked up, things are likely much more sensitive here.

Zack waits for it to be on before responding. “Maybe. If you hadn’t resisted Jenova, I get the feeling something bad would’ve happened. Whatever that future could’ve been was already circumvented with that. Coming back was just the final nail in the coffin.”

“Perhaps. When did you read Loveless?” He asks, sifting through the fridge for something the two of them could eat. It’s remarkable how little he consumed before Zack essentially moved into his apartment, in that past-future.

“During that time they had me off at Costa Del Sol. Wanted to figure out what the big deal was about it.”

Ah. That would explain things. He’d half expected the boy to have memorized it from how often Genesis spoke in quotes of the thing. “Did you find it interesting?”

“Sort of. I mean, there’s a few ways I can guess the story going from there. Do you think there even *is* an ending? Everyone says that there has to be one, but what if it was left like that so people could draw their own conclusions? End the story on the note that they thought right?”

Had they met prior to everything that happened, Sephiroth thinks that Genesis would have *loved* Zack. Sometimes the boy asks questions that sound so obvious, but have never been mentioned before. “The idea that you write your own ending to the characters story… One can’t

help but find it fascinating."

The boy smiles, glancing over his shoulder. "I don't think you're going to find anything in there, Seph."

He's right, of course. He'd used the last of the little he had for their breakfast this morning. Even the hashbrowns, left over from when Angeal had commandeered his kitchen barely a week ago were gone. The only mark left upon his home by his friend.

By both of them.

The only mark that either of them had ever come here, made themselves at home, warmed up the cold walls with the breaths of a life other than his own.

He'd never used the hashbrowns the first time around. He threw them away, barely able to lay his eyes on them. What does it say about everything that's changed now that he was able to make them with the same recipe Angeal used to?

An arm wraps around his shoulders, another hand gently closing the door of the fridge. "Let's get to bed now. It's been a long day for you, hasn't it?"

That's putting it simply. He finds out that Jenova is *evil,* also not his mother, that he's a Cetra, that he has a *cousin,* and that his best friend is *also* a Cetra, and is *also* dating his cousin.

He blinks back to reality as he's directed to lay down in his own bed. Zack smiles at him as he lays the blankets over him, whispering a

goodnight. It’s nice. He doesn’t think he’s ever experienced something like this.

It’s as he falls asleep, the exhaustion from the events of the day finally coming in full force, that the boy makes his leave. How must he be handling this? He’s spent so much time taking care of Sephiroth that no one’s been taking care of him.

He’ll do that tomorrow, he decides. He’ll take care of Zack. His best friend. His *family,* if he and Aerith ever marry. It’s the least he could do.

Chapter End Notes

in other news; sephiroth is sad. what's new?

Zack - Roots

Chapter Summary

Or: Sometimes you need a reminder or two to get things moving.

Chapter Notes

oh wow what's that? plot movement? wow..... never heard of her

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Zack wakes up the next morning, it's with a clearer image of his dreams than he thinks he's *ever* had.

"Jeez. Planet can't think of *any* colors other than green, green, and *more* green?" Muttering to himself, he stumbles his way out of the guest room (that's basically his room, at this point). It doesn't look like Seph's awake yet, but after all the things that happened yesterday that's not much of a surprise.

Dude had like, his entire cell structure get rearranged. Anyone would want to sleep in, and that's *not* counting the whole *lineage* thing.

Huh. If his real mom was a Cetra, why'd Shinra believe *Jenova* was one? Now that's a question.

He sets about making coffee, carefully measuring the absolutely *terrifying* amount of sugar Sephiroth prefers (when he first watched him dump half a jar into the mug he'd thought he was hallucinating). His own glass of water is comparatively much simpler. It's not often he's even allowed *near* a coffee machine, so he takes some joy from that experience.

People act like he's going to chug *another* pot of the stuff!

It’s right as he’s pouring the stuff into a mug that Sephiroth makes his way into the kitchen, but the man's greeting goes unanswered as he stares at the roots of his hair.

The *black* roots.

“Wow, man. Thought it’d be brown.” Zack comments, smiling as he passes the cup to him. It’s a long moment before he gets a response. “ *What* are you talking about, Zackary?”

He blinks. “Your natural hair. It’s- oh *wow* that looks weird.” From where the black meets the silver, the second color is peeling off like some sort of *sunburn* . Seph blinks at him for a moment, and then rushes into the bathroom. He follows at a comparatively calmer pace.

The man is staring wide eyed at his reflection, rubbing at the peels. Each bit that flakes off reveals what now looks more like a really, *really* dark brown. Like, you’d have to shine a light really close in order to *see* the color kinda dark.

“Hm. Aerith did mention something about this, but… I suppose I had expected it to take longer. Can you find a way to help with the flaking? I’d rather not be seen like *this.”*

That’s fair. …Ha, *fair.*

After a moment of searching on his PHS, he grins triumphantly. “Just like, let it soak in some warm water and then rub it with a towel a bunch. It’s technically advice for sunburns, but it *should* help. A bit.”

The two of them agree that *anything's* better than the weird flaky mess going on up there, and so Zack is relegated to finding something the two of them can eat while Sephiroth handles *that.*

It's half an hour later that he's back in the apartment, holding some Wutaian takeout. Five of those minutes were spent trying to open the door, sure, but SOLDIERS eat a *lot* of food, and he knows the amount his friend can eat like the back of his hand.

He can still hear the shower running, so he puts the things away and brings the takeout into the bathroom.

Towels. *Everywhere.* "Uh… I got us some food. You look like you've been handling things well."

He does, actually. Almost all of his hair is now dark brown, with just a small chunk at the bottom displaying that it was ever silver in the first place. Right as he goes to ask a question, the Generals PHS beeps. "What does it say, Zack?"

He checks. "...Hojo wants you to speak with him. Like, right now."

The creak of the showerhead being ever-so-slightly crushed in the man's grip is an excellent portrayal of how *little* he would like to do that. In fact, it's such an excellent portrayal that the fearsome glare that lands on the PHS can only accentuate it. *"Does* he."

It's not a question. He nods, and the last of the clean towels is used to dry the hair, taking away the last of the silver flakes.

"Well, I'm afraid the *Professor* has caught me at a bad time. I'm going

to eat something, and only *then* will I consider his request with the gravity it deserves." He grabs the bag and digs through it for a moment, almost tearing the packaging of his chosen sacrifice in half in his anger.

Zack opens his in a comparatively gentler manner. "So… how funny do you think his reaction is going to be when he sees your hair?"

Sephiroth snorts, taking a moment to swallow. "I don't doubt that it's going to be hilarious. Perhaps it might draw the name of my father out of him, though that part I *do* doubt. He claims the position to be his own, however…"

Appearance wise it's like comparing a perfect apple to the ugliest pile of rotting trash you've ever seen. Yeah, he doesn't blame the man for doubting it. "Maybe it's that guy I found in a coffin in Nibelheim." He muses. If time travel is possible, then who knows what else might be too. Weird coffin guys being his friends dad could just be how the world works.

"The guy you found *where?"*

Wait. "Did I not tell you? There's a guy in a coffin in the basement of the Shinra Manor. He was… asleep? I think? He didn't really look like he was alive though. Might've been a vampire."

A sigh. "Zackary. Vampires aren't real."

Zack rolls his eyes. "And Cetra are a myth. And *aliens* are a myth. Dude, at this point vampires being real would *not* surprise me. In fact, I'd welcome it. I love surprises." What's life without them?

Sephiroth stares at him like he's insane. Which is entirely possible, but he *doubts* it. Tseng would have told him if he was crazy. Probably. "At this point I don't know why I'm surprised."

The conversation pauses as they continue eating. It doesn't really take them all that long to finish, though the man *definitely* stretches out the time by moving as slow as physically possible every now and then. No sane person would want to visit Hojo on a day off, so… he gets it.

Wait. They *did* turn the jammer on, didn't they?

A momentary check shows that the thing is *dangerously* low on battery, having run all night, but that it was never shut off. They take the liberty to do that now.

"Where'd you even get this thing?" Zack asks, gesturing to the little thing. It's clearly of Turk make, but they'd *never* leave it lying around to be taken. Seph shrugs. "It belonged to Genesis. He left it here at some point, and I never got around to returning it. I suppose it comes in handy every now and then."

Definitely. A beep comes from the man's pocket as he says that, and he scowls at the screen.

"Guessing he doesn't want to wait any longer. Take a picture of his reaction for me, alright? I *need* to see that."

A thumbs up is his only response as the door closes behind him. Glancing around the apartment, he sighs.

Become a First, they said. You won't have to do clean-up duty

anymore, *they said* . Look at him now, trying to figure out how to deal with hair flakes on pristine towels. Seriously, does he have to *vacuum* them first, or does he just throw them in the washer?

Wait. *Should* he even go to the washer? He shouldn't know where they are in the First Class building. Angeal handled that sort of thing. He isn't even a *First* yet. That only happened after Banora. Which hasn't happened yet. *Angeal's mom is alive.*

Somehow he only *just* realized how many things they can change. One last glance around the bathroom for anything he missed directs his attention to something laying atop the windowsill. What he sees makes his blood run cold.

A white feather.

Chapter End Notes

> i considered poorly photo shopping sephiroth with dark brown hair but i never got around to it. anyways, things happening wow!!! wonder who the guy in the coffin could be.....

Sephiroth - Hojo

Chapter Summary

A short interaction leads to bigger revelations. As is the norm with Shinra.

Chapter Notes

i think hojo unironically turned out to be one of my favorite characters to write because i could just make him as much of an asshole as i wanted

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The path from his apartment to Professor Hojo's lab is one well traveled. It's engraved into his mind as surely as his own name.

'Right turn here, take a left there, up the elevator now…'

He can only wonder how the man might react to the drastic change in his appearance. He *himself* doesn't know how to feel about it, after all. On one hand, this is the hair color he *would've* had for his entire life, had he not been given Jenova cells. On the other… it's *not* the color he's had his entire life.

Perhaps he'll get used to it in time. It hasn't even been like this for an hour, after all.

The door to the lab opens the moment he steps close. His hand gently brushes over the PHS in his pocket - hopefully he'll manage to get that picture Zack wanted.

A few of the technicians lingering around stare at him with wide eyes as he walks past. What thoughts are running through their heads? What do *they* believe would have caused this?

It doesn't matter. He knows the truth.

The Professor's back is to the door as he enters the private room. "Hojo."

The call of his name gets him to glance back, and when his eyes land on Sephiroth he jerks back in surprise. *"Valentine."* The name (it *must* be a name) is hissed with such intense venom he finds himself shifting backwards in surprise.

Valentine. Is that his fathers name? Does the man's absence have to do with Hojo? Nobody the man dislikes with such clear *intensity* would have suffered a good fate.

"...Sephiroth. What *have* you done to your hair?" His nose is wrinkled as he runs his fingers through his hair. "Nothing. It was like this when I woke up this morning." Only partially true, but it's not as though the man has ever been able to tell he was lying *before.*

A huff. "I suppose this must be why you were *late* to your appointment? It should have prompted you to arrive *sooner."*

"I didn't want to." He finds himself fiddling with his bang again. Where on *Gaia* did this habit come from?

Hojo pales at the sight of the mannerism. "You've never done that before. You are not *made* to fidget. Where did you learn that?" He shrugs. "I am unaware." The truth. "I simply started doing it. Why does it bother you? Does it remind you of something? Or *someone?"*

The way his face turns red warms Sephiroth's chest. Truly, nothing could bring him more joy than upsetting Hojo.

"You are testing my *patience,* Sephiroth. Let me remind you that you would not *exist* without me-"

"Who is Lucrecia Crescent?" If there's anyone who might know, it would be *him.* Of course, he'd much rather hold this knowledge to his chest for as long as possible, but… there are some things that are better said now. Even if he says he doesn't know anything, it's *something.*

The man damn near *growls,* face turning a shade of red Sephiroth had never thought possible. *"Where did you learn that name?"*

"Who. Is. She?" He says, accentuating each pause as though he's talking to a child. Which… wouldn't really be *inaccurate,* with how the man can act sometimes, but it serves the purpose he intended. "Tell me about *my mother,* Hojo."

"Your *mother* is named *Jenova-"*

"Do not lie to me!"

The two of them sit there in silence for a moment after the outburst. When's the last time he ever yelled at Hojo? Has he *ever* done such a thing? Most likely not. He'd been conditioned since childhood to obey his superiors and to *never* talk back to them.

It's freeing, in a sense.

“She is dead because of *you.* That is all you need to know.” Is the only response he is given. The only answer to his question. The first thing he learns about his mother beside her name is that he *killed* her.

Her blood lies on his hands. He can see it now, superimposed over his black gloves.

Is this what it feels like to be scared?

Was it because of the Jenova cells inside him that she died? Did he tear her apart coming out of the womb? Did he *poison* her? Did the cells make him leech off of her like a *parasite?*

It’s not as though he’d been unaware she died giving birth to him. The specific *phrasing* Hojo used though… it’s more direct than that. Perhaps that story had been a lie all along?

Either way, he pulls away as the man goes to inject something into him. Whatever makes up that black *mass* inside the syringe makes his instincts rear as though he’s facing a threat. Instincts that had never *been* there prior to the Planet purging him of Jenova cells. Are they connected?

Are those *more* of that Calamity’s accursed cells?

Just how many times has he watched those things be injected into his body over the years? Hundreds? *Thousands?*

No wonder he succumbed to its siren song so easily. It’s miraculous he

didn't hear it *sooner.* That voice had seemed so sweet when he first heard it. Filled with what he'd believed to be kindness. After hearing the voice of his cousin (who seems to be kindness incarnate, though there's a steel in her eyes), he finds it nothing more than a mockery.

Hojo scowls as he shifts away. He'd almost forgotten the man was there, honestly. "Would you sit *still?* You despise being here, and yet you intentionally avoid getting it *over with."*

"I will have no more of those cells placed within me."

His eyes narrow in defiance as the man stares him down. "You do not get to *argue* with me, Subject S. You will either take it willingly or *unwillingly."*

"How about *not at all?"*

Hojo aims another jab at his vein, and rather than fulfill his years old desire of slicing the man in two he takes the *mature* response and leaves the lab. Gaia, he'd forgotten just how *annoying* the man could be.

Still. There's something to be said about how insistent he was with the cells. The name he said earlier, as well…

Valentine.

Perhaps the company has some records on him? Maybe he's the man in that coffin Zackary mentioned (he should really have a talk with the boy about *telling his commanding officer about things),* or maybe he's long dead.

Either way, it's something, and he has his hair to thank for it. Though he's still not particularly *used* to the color.

Chapter End Notes

> wow vincent valentine! who knew! totally not me. anyways, next chapter is going to be *very* interesting

Angeal - Idle Thought

Chapter Summary

Things are weird. Turns out, some people noticed.

Chapter Notes

wow its angeal! he appears every now and then. adds exposition. takes place at ambiguous times during the plot. thinks a lot. you know, average angeal things. i wonder if i added enough self loathing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Angeal, admittedly, hadn't really *considered* the consequences of joining Genesis. Zack could take care of himself, after all, and the boy was on a fast track to first. Sephiroth would take care of him.

But… it really hit him just a few hours later that *there was no going back.* When he'd mentioned it to Genesis, his friend (even in his *significantly* more twitchy state) had told him to *'Just check on the puppy, Angeal. Here, I'll even come with you.'*

When he'd opened the window to Zack's apartment though, there wasn't anyone there.

Nor was there any sign of him *anywhere else* the boy tended to frequent.

The two of them had started to get concerned at that point. Genesis hadn't really *known* the boy beyond what Angeal had told him, but it's hard to not be fond of the kid even from just stories.

Only through chance did they manage to figure out where he was. A comment from Lazard about him sticking close with Sephiroth, and

the man *tolerating* it. Which came as a shock, since Zack can be… *trying* on someone's patience.

Further prying of information from the Director had them learning that it was because of their *absence.* That the two of them were sticking together in order to be able to process it.

Angeal couldn't help but feel a bit guilty about that.

Waiting outside the window to Sephiroth's apartment, the two of them find themselves in hushed conversation - or, rather, argument.
"Angeal, we *cannot* risk either of them knowing we're here! You know *damn well* that Sephiroth is going to kill us the moment we're in his sights!"

"He *won't!* You heard Lazard, he was so upset by it that he took a *week* off! He's *never* done that!"

"Precisely my point! If he's so *upset* about it, who's to say-"

The creak of a door opening.

Sephiroth and Zack are talking about something quietly. It's the softest he's *ever* heard the puppy's voice, and *Gaia* doesn't it hurt to know he's the cause?

Genesis' mouth twitches at whatever they talk about. "Your student has read Loveless?"

“I… didn’t think so. He’s never had the patience for that sort of thing.”

A noncommittal hum. “...What the *hell* are they talking about?”

Angeal strains his ears in an attempt to pick up whatever his friend is so confused over. Genesis has always had the sharper ears of them both, and the enhancements only made that fact even more obvious.

Are- “Are they debating the ending of Loveless?”

“Sounds like it.” Genesis moves a bit closer. “There’s… they’re upset about something. You can tell based on their body language.”

He’d noticed that too. Sephiroth has a bit of a slouch to him, even as he digs through the freezer. Zack, who’s mannerisms have a tendency to be *much* more telegraphed, looks practically *despondent.* But… There's something *else* about the two of them.

Sephiroth pauses, staring at the freezer as though it isn’t really there. He almost goes to comfort the man on instinct (stupid, *stupid,* you *left* them both they don’t deserve comfort from a *monster-),* but it’s Zack who gets there first.

A quiet conversation and he’s carrying the *much* taller man to his room like he’d done it a million times before. Which would be *impossible,* because beyond a few meetings here and there he’d never been in the General’s apartment.

At this point, Genesis makes his leave. “ *My friend, the fates are cruel…* I’ll be at the edge of the Sector 5 slums when you’re done here, Angeal. Take your time.”

He doesn't know how long he sits there, watching Sephiroth sleep and Zack get comfortable in a guest room.

It's strange to realize that he's only been gone for barely a day and a half. His life as a First Class SOLDIER feels like it's worlds away.

Must be the fate of a monster.

It's with the dawn that *Zack,* of all people, rises first. He fiddles around with the coffee machine and Angeal's heart almost stops (the fond, albeit terrifying memories of that incident surging up before being drowned by the knowledge that he can never have that again) before he realizes that it's for Sephiroth.

How does Zack know how he takes his coffee?

Things just aren't adding up. Something about the two of them is different, and it's *not* just because of him leaving.

They talk for a bit.

Angeal absently notes that there's something *strange* about Sephiroth's hair, and judging by the panicked (Sephiroth has *never* panicked) rush into the bathroom, the man noticed too.

From his new position outside the window, just narrowly out of the two's range of sight, he can pick up a bit more of their conversation. Something about an *Aerith* and knowing that this would happen… but how could anyone know that their hair would be *shedding?*

Strange.

A short conversation later and Zack is gone from the apartment. He halfheartedly considers trying to talk to his (former) friend, but it just… doesn't sound like a good idea.

Genesis wasn't wrong about there being a chance of death should they talk to him.

He has to take a minute to fly out of sight when the man takes a break from his hair to open the window, but it's not as though he misses anything. For a long thirty minutes all he can see is Sephiroth's hair slowly turning black as more and more of the silver flakes off.

Maybe Genesis would like to hear about this part.

Zack comes in a moment later, carrying a bag of food. Conveniently, it's also the time that Sephiroth finishes with his hair.

The conversation they have about Hojo is… enlightening. Is *that* what the man's like? Angeal has only ever interacted with Hollander, who's… *interesting,* at best.

…Zack has never been to Nibelheim.

The longer the conversation stretches on the more concerned he grows. The two of them act as though they've known each other for *years,* when it could only be a few days *at most.*

The longer the conversation stretches out, the more concerned he grows. When the puppy cites the infamous myth of the Cetra as though they're *actually real?* …There's something going on here. Does it have something to do with how familiar they are with one another?

Hollander mentioned that he would tell them more about the cause of their degradation the next time they saw them. As he watches Sephiroth take his leave to go talk to Hojo, he takes a minute to watch as Zack gathers together the laundry, debating with himself for a second.

Angeal leaves.

He doesn't even notice the feather he leaves behind.

Chapter End Notes

> genesis was one of the most fun parts to write about this chapter. he will also appear more often, though not with a pov. sad, i know, but my school blocked the website i used to find loveless quotes and i had no intention of memorizing it. still don't

Sephiroth - Names

Chapter Summary

> Names are important things, you know. They're one of the building blocks of who you are. They're also the main way you will be remembered.

Chapter Notes

> this chapter was a test on how much dialouge i could write to progress the story without going insane. turns out, i love it when people (and myself) talk (looking at the lengths of these notes, i wonder how i didn't realize that sooner)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sephiroth finds that there are much better ways to spend his time than by simply wandering around the building. He had prevented Hojo from injecting him with *more* of Jenova's cells, though it took a bit of… effort in order to ensure that he didn't try to sneak it when he wasn't looking. The man should find his remaining supply of the stuff thoroughly destroyed.

He needs to find a way to learn about Valentine.

The Turk halls are the perfect place for that. Although SOLDIER and them tend to get into conflicts fairly often, there's no doubt that the director has a soft spot for him.

It comes with the territory of having partially *raised* him.

If there's anyone who might know anything else about his mother and (potentially- he's not entirely certain about the connection, after all-) his father, it would be the man who leads Shinra's group of spies and assassins.

Really, it's strange that he didn't consider asking him about this sooner.

The few Turks who bother to acknowledge his existence (though the entire department undoubtedly knows he's here by now - he often wonders how they spread the information among each other so quickly) don't bother with more than a nod. His presence here is expected, at this point, whenever he wants some *'fatherly comfort'* as one of them put it a while back.

That Turk was also put through a wall, which is why they don't bother with anything else.

"Ah, Sephiroth. Not often you make my acquaintance these days." Veld says, turning to face him and hesitating, just for a moment. It proves his theory - he's one of the few people in the company who knows about the truth of his origins, which means he *has* to know something about his parents.

"Hello, Veld. I've come with a few questions I was hoping you might know the answers to."

He blinks, then smiles and gestures for him to sit. "I'll tell you what I can. Mind if I ask about the hair?"

Veld's always been soft on him. Normally people who came in like this would face severe consequences, but he always gets what he wants. Well, so long as it's within his clearance level. There are some things that a Turk will never divulge, no matter how fond they are of someone.

"I woke up like this. It brings me to my question - Hojo mentioned a

name when he first saw me. Seemed to view me *as* whoever it belonged to. Valentine. I was hoping you might recognize it."

The Director's face goes blank. The kind that he's come to find means he was *hoping* something wasn't true, but it was. "It… was the name of my partner, Vincent Valentine. He's been dead twenty-five years, ever since a mission in Nibelheim."

Nibelheim. Why is it *always* Nibelheim? Zackary had mentioned a man in a coffin. Could that mean… surely the boy's joke wasn't…

"I see. My apologies for bringing up bad memories."

The man shakes his head. "It's alright. You do look remarkably similar to him, however. It was hard to tell with the silver hair, but with it being as dark as it is now…"

Hm. Interesting.

Perhaps he ought to listen to Zack more often. The boy has a strong penchant for being right.

"I have another question, if it doesn't bother you much. I've come to find out through various… *means*… that my mother's name was Lucretia Crescent. Do you know anything about her?"

Veld glances to the side, considering. Sephiroth can only guess how many old ghosts he's dragging up with this conversation. Maybe he should give the man an apology gift after this, for making him recall these things. It's what Zack would do.

“She was a part of the same mission in Nibelheim. Vincent was always a bit sweet on her, from what I recall, though I don’t know if they ever actually… Well, Hojo came home with a baby, and without either of them. Considering your appearance, though… I wouldn’t doubt it.”

Sephiroth has never felt more thankful in his life. “You have done so much more for me than you realize, Veld. *Thank you.”*

The genuine thanks out of him seems to stun the man for a few moments, but he quickly rights himself and smiles. “Of course, Sephiroth. If you ever want to know anything about your… father, you can feel free to ask me. I’ll tell you what I can.”

As he makes his leave back to the First Class apartments, it’s with a lightness to his step that he’d never thought possible even just a week ago. Not only does he know his mother’s name, but his *father’s* as well! He even has someone he can ask for more details!

He doesn’t think he’s ever felt this happy in his *life.*

His soft smile (that he hadn’t even noticed was there) drops when he sees the look on Zack’s face. He’s holding a feather and looking at it with a mixture of fear and *devastation.*

“What’s wrong? Did Angeal or Genesis come?”

“I think so. It was on the sill in the bathroom after you left. I don’t know how much he *heard-* oh Gaia, he’s *alive.”*

Ah. So that's what this is about.

"He is. So long as I have the power you will not have to kill him again." It's said softly, in consideration of the fact that they don't have the jammer on. "I found out who my father is."

It's said in hopes of lightening the mood, and it manages to do just that. Zack whips around with a smile on his face as though the feather in his hands was nothing more than a pebble on the ground. "Really? What's his name? Did he work here? Do you look like him, or did you get your looks from your mother?"

"Vincent Valentine. He was a Turk, from what I was told. I believe that I look more like him than her, seeing as when Hojo laid eyes on me he thought I *was* him."

The boy squints, eyes darting across his face. "I wonder which parts you got from either of them?"

He does too. Which brings him to… "He was last seen in Nibelheim over twenty-five years ago. Presumed dead. What exactly did you see in that coffin?" Zack squints, then shrugs. "A guy with black hair. He *looked* like a vampire - pale skin and all - and he was snoring. Couldn't make out much with how dark it was, but I *did* think he looked a bit like you."

That seals the deal, then. Hojo was at Nibelheim based on what Veld mentioned, *something* happened to his father, and now he's asleep in a coffin (and presumably *has been* for twenty-five years).

Zack could handle Jenova, should it try to grab on the scattered remains of its cells and claim him for its own. He doesn't think he'd fall for its trickery a second time, but he's found the world works in

ways he could have previously only imagined of it.

Still.

They have a goal, now. A purpose.

A *mission.*

When Zack looks at him in the eyes, it's with the same spark he figures he has. They're in the past, aren't they? They have a chance to change the world. Why not start now?

"What's the goal, Seph?"

"We need to go to Nibelheim."

Chapter End Notes

> oh yeah the plots moving alright. sometimes i wonder if i really should write end notes but i've always thought chapters look weird without them. anyways, things are actually going to start like, moving. plot progression!!!!! who knew that was a thing

Zack - The Town

Chapter Summary

The return to Nibelheim.

Chapter Notes

also known as the inevitable point that happens in all ff7 fanfics. anyways we're almost at chapter 13 teehee :) totally not one of my favorites or anything hahahaha

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He had honestly thought they'd spend more time in Midgar before making the trek to Nibelheim. Not that he *minds* Seph going to find the guy who's probably (who is he kidding, *definitely)* his dad! It's just… the last time he saw the town they were…

What about the time they left? Did it keep going, like an… alternate universe? Or did it stop existing the moment they were gone? He hopes Cloud got out alright. He's been avoiding the thoughts of the kid because *Gaia,* there's no feeling like having failed someone who trusted you.

Zack hopes that timeline stopped existing. Thinking about having just *left* him there (though it was no fault of his own), *knowing* how Shinra handles loose ends…

There are some fates worse than death.

"Are you alright, Zack? You look worried about something." Sephiroth said, frowning at him. They'd… *acquired* some transportation by taking advantage of the company's willingness to bend head over heels to keep themselves in Silver General's good graces, the same way they'd gotten some time off.

Of course, there's definitely a Turk or two following them. At this point they're *hoping* someone reports back about their Director's presumed dead partner being found alive, in a coffin, in an abandoned laboratory on *Shinra property*.

That is, if the guy *is* actually Vincent Valentine. They haven't really confirmed that part yet.

Either way, they know something's weird with the two of them. Not that they've been really *hiding* anything (other than their conversations) anyways. Still, there's something to be said about the fact that they were allowed outside of Midgar.

They must know that there's little chance of them actually *stopping* Seph, right?

"Oh, yeah. Just thinking about the future we left. Did it keep going even with us gone, or did it cease to exist?" He responds, smiling. The guy's gotten a lot *softer* now that the Jenova cells are largely gone from his body. Zack can only *wonder* how strange it must feel.

"Hm. I suppose we will never know for certain." Smiling softly, Sephiroth turns back to keeping an eye on the road.

It's a pretty long trek to Nibelheim. In total, they spend just about two days getting there at top speed. Luckily, they don't actually have any interference from monsters like *last time*.

The peaks of the mountain are as foreboding a sight as they are thrilling. They're finally here *,* but they're also *finally here*.

The people of the town watch them warily, though there's a certain kind of look in their eyes that is indicative of the fact they might be harassed later on. Especially obvious is the way their eyes lay on Sephiroth as though he's a rare Gongagan mushroom despite the hair.

He makes sure to stick closer than usual.

It's easy to make their way to the Shinra Mansion. The place has beds, after all, and it's not as though either of them want to wake up and be faced with Nibelheim, especially after their last memories of the place involve a *lot* of death (on Zack's part) and hazy moments of fire and screams (according to Seph).

So.

They set their stuff down on the beds near the stone wall and make their way down.

"The coffin needed a key last time, but I think a sword would also work pretty well. You know, brute force works best!" He says cheerfully as they near the door. The two of them keep their eyes carefully pointed away from that *library*.

Neither of them want to go near the place. Not after what happened.

A small bit of kicking the door down later (which took a shocking amount of force, considering how… *fragile* it looks), they're near the coffin.

Which means they're potentially near Sephiroth's dad.

“So… wanna do the honors, Seph?”

Not that his Shinra-Issued sword could actually break this lock. Thing looks like the sturdiest thing in this entire building (which isn’t saying a lot, honestly).

In lieu of answering, Masamune slices through the lock like it’s butter. Which… it might as well be, considering how intensely the sword gets sharpened every night.

Inside is a man cloaked in red, and with the shine of a flashlight over his face it’s all too clear that he is *definitely* related to Sephiroth.

“Is it just me, or do you look like a taller clone of your dad?”

The guy is still asleep, somehow. Or… is it a *magical* sleep? There’s a kind of haziness to the interior of the coffin that’s indicative of someone casting Sleep so many times that it’s visible to the naked eye.

The two of them pull the guy (Vincent Valentine, hopefully) out of the coffin. As Sephiroth picks him up, Zack finds his gaze being drawn to the library. “Hey, Seph? You take him upstairs. I’m gonna torch the place.”

“Alright. Be careful. The fire shouldn’t spread beyond the basement, not with as little flammable material down here as there is.”

Once his friend is safely upstairs with his father, Zack takes care of things. Man, this place has *no* ventilation. No wonder Seph went crazy

after being down here, he must've been inhaling all *kinds* of things.

When he surfaces back out of the stone wall, he takes a big, *overwhelming* gulp of (sort-of) fresh air. "That place. *Sucks ass."*

"Indeed. I believe he should be waking up soon. I administered an antidote to the Sleep, but… with how heavily it was layered I'm doubtful it was too effective." Sephiroth states, eyes tracing the features of Valentine with no shortage of *reverence.* It doesn't really surprise him.

"Excited to meet your dad?"

The man sighs, glancing at him for a moment. "I thought I was. Looking at him now… what will he think of me? Knowing what I did - what I *would* have done, had we not come back. It's terrifying to think there's a chance of him rejecting me. Does he even *know* I'm his son?"

Ah. That's- a reasonable concern.

"Look. I don't doubt that he'll love you, man. Sure, you've done a lot of things," That's putting it simply, "But you're still a good person. That's the important part."

He smiles. "Anyways, if he *is* upset I'll punch him for you!"

That gets a laugh out of Sephiroth. "Every time you say something that sounds smart, you somehow *always* manage to follow it up with a statement that halves my respect for your intelligence."

“Hey! It had to be said at some point, y’know!”

Seph shakes his head. “I appreciate it though, Zackary. It’s nice knowing that you’re willing to be there for me, even despite everything.”

He smiles at the man. “Of course. I’d be a pretty terrible friend if I just abandoned you for no good reason, right?”

Whatever response Sephiroth was going to give him goes unsaid as the man on the bed starts to stir.

Chapter End Notes

> i'm steadily running out of ideas when it comes to names for these chapters. maybe i should've planned those ahead of time like i did the tags. oh well. im creative enough to think of 30 names in one sitting. actually no why did i do this to myself

Sephiroth - The Father

Chapter Summary

Vincent and Sephiroth meet, and a *long* overdue talk is had.

Chapter Notes

father son bonding core. the plot after moving along at a pace not comparable to molasses: <('o')>

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sephiroth watches with baited breath as the man (his *father-)* rouses from the magic induced slumber. It should've taken at *least* another hour for the power to dissipate, and even longer for him to actually be roused, yet…

Well, it's easy to tell that the man's spent some time in Hojo's clutches. It really shouldn't surprise him at this point.

Glowing red eyes slide open, grazing over Zack as though simply in acknowledgement of his presence before landing on Sephiroth. And *freezing.*

Vincent Valentine's entire body goes still as he stares, wide eyed, at Sephiroth. "You look so much like your mother." Is said softly, and the man blinks as though he didn't even realize he was going to say it aloud.

"I do? Zack thinks I look more like you." He replies, a little breathless. This is his father. *His father.* He has a father and it's not Hojo and he's *alive* and right in *front of him.*

"That- I don't recall ever… doing *that* with your mother. I'm sorry, but-"

“It’s not like there’s a shortage of other ways to do that sort of thing.” Zack interrupts, cheeks a bit flushed at the implication. “I mean, she could’ve done other things too? From what we know Hojo was the only other guy there and he’s already been taken out of the running.”

Sephiroth doesn’t bother pointing out that their reasoning was the Professor being too *ugly*. It’s not as though when faced with the man in front of him he’s got even the slightest doubt regarding his parentage anymore.

“Lucretia…” Vincent pauses for a moment, then sighs. “She would have, actually. Though she and Hojo were married she was never actually *in love* with him, from what I could tell. It was for the Jenova Project and nothing more.”

So she… “Do you know if she loved me?”

Did she *want* him? Or was he just viewed by her as nothing more than a test subject, the same way Hojo has viewed him for his entire life?

“I believe she did. I remember, vaguely… she begged to see you, just once. I think when you were born she came to a realization of sorts.” The man sighs, glancing to the side. “I am sorry. I don’t know much regarding what happened to her. She simply stopped being present during my moments of lucidity, and the next thing I know…”

He’s with them both in this room.

“How’d you recognize Seph so quickly?” Zack asks, leaning close with a grin.

“He looks like his mother, though the hair’s a fair bit darker. His eyes have the same shape as her, and they have the same chin.” Vincent states with ease, as though he’s talking about the weather. Sephiroth can’t bring himself to mind.

“I see.” Onto the question he’s been dreading. Somehow, Zack seems to notice his nervousness, and gives him a smile. It makes him feel more confident, knowing that his friend is by his side. “...Would you mind if I called you father?”

Vincent blinks at him for a moment, eyes wide in surprise, before a soft smile crosses his face. “Not at all. Even on the off-chance that you aren’t related to me by blood, I would be honored to have you as my son, Sephiroth.”

His heart feels as though it’s soaring through the air.

This is the part Hojo missed when he tried to get him to call the man father all those years ago. He lacked the kindness, the fondness, every part that would make him trust the man enough to give him the mantle.

Vincent Valentine- *his father*- has achieved all of that in spades despite them having met not even five minutes ago, and doesn’t that say *plenty* about Hojo as a person?

It doesn’t matter now. When they go back to Midgar his first goal will be to slay the man who kept his father from him (who made it so that his mother never even saw the child she birthed). His second will be to ensure that his cousin and her mother are safe from any harm.

Right. He should probably tell his father about *everything else.* Up to a point, anyways.

"Mother was a Cetra. Jenova was… *not.* It's more-so a virus than anything." He states. It's best to get to the point rather than beat around the bush. Their Turk followers must be writing up the report of the century, wherever they're hiding. He's still convinced they were followed somehow.

He can't bring himself to care.

"I see. From what I know…" Vincent trails off for a moment, head tilted as though listening to something. "The Calamity from the Skies, is it not?"

Zack blinks. "How'd you know? From the books in the basement it seemed as though everyone involved thought that it *was* an Ancient."

His father taps the side of his head with a finger of the pointed gauntlet, smiling grimly. "Lucretia didn't want me to die. Luckily, she just so happened to know a *fair bit* about the planetary WEAPON Chaos. *Also* luckily, she happened to be capable enough to force him into a human vessel."

So his mother was a fan of human experimentation too, though he can't bring himself to feel upset at her. Had she not done this, he would have never met his father. Perhaps things would have gone entirely different, following the same pathway they had before him and Zack were brought back here.

"Ah. Well, Zack and I are Cetra. Did you know that my mother had a sister? I met my cousin in the slums of Midgar. She's quite nice. I think she'd like you." It's an adequate explanation. He'd rather not go

into too much detail, seeing as this man *was* a Turk.

He'd notice any discrepancies in his story instantly.

His father blinks for a few moments, his smile softening into something gentler. "I see. I'd like to meet her. You must be Zack, then?"

They never did introduce themselves, did they?

"Yep! It's great to meet you, Seph's my best friend and I'm glad he gets to have a dad. Did you know his hair used to be silver? It shed it like a snake."

There's nothing quite like Zackary to test someone's patience. At least, so long as they aren't energetic enough to match the puppy. It's not very surprising his father isn't one of them. Sephiroth is getting the feeling that he takes after the man in that regard.

"I… see." Vincent blinks. "Chaos mentioned that one of the Planet's children had returned to her. I presume it had something to do with that?"

"Yes. You're taking this remarkably well, father. I must say I'm impressed." He is. Really, a lesser man would be panicking in the corner right about now. Fiddling with his hair, he glances at Zack for a moment.

Would it be worth telling him about their time traveling? Not now, certainly, but… later on?

As though the thought had reached him, the boy shrugs in a ‘go ahead’ type of manner. His father, meanwhile, is watching him mess with his hair with an almost *nostalgic* gleam in his eyes.

“Your mother used to do that, you know. Every time she had something on her mind.”

“She did?” So these new mannerisms came from her? She's with him even *now?*

Chapter End Notes

you can really tell i never figured out a better way to end this chapter

Sephiroth - Resolve

Chapter Summary

Sometimes a job needs doing, so it's a job that will be done.

Chapter Notes

hehehehehe we're almost at chapter 13..... anyways this chapter is very nice i love how i portrayed sephiroth here. i have officially finished editing the entire fic so itll be posted every day now

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They spend a lot of time in that dusty old room talking. Sephiroth doesn't mind that Vincent is hesitant to reveal the details of what Hojo and his mother did to him - the man is entitled to his secrets.

What really matters is that he's *here.*

Still, there are a few other things that they have to share with the man. Those being that Jenova should- if the tug he feels in the residual cells is true- still be in the Reactor.

When he shares the information, Zack having broken away at some point to dig through whatever remains of the library for anything written by his mother, Vincent *growls,* eyes flashing a vibrant yellow that is *painfully* bright against the darkness of the mansion.

"The Calamity is *nearby,* you say?" Something that is most *certainly* not his father says. This must be the WEAPON Chaos that he had mentioned.

He nods.

The grin that spreads across the man's face is wholly inhuman, yet despite that he feels not an inch of fear nor hesitation. Chaos would never hurt a child of the Planet (tainted by the Calamity though he may have been).

“Before we do anything, we ought to make sure Zackary is there too. He deserves to watch it *burn.”* He hisses the last word, eyes tracking the edge of the town that, in another time, he’d torn down with his own two hands while under that things control. The puppy had been forced to watch him be *taken* by the Calamity, and now he will be given the chance to watch it *writhe* as they snuff out every bit of its life.

“Watch *what* burn?” Asks the man in question, brushing soot from his shoulders as he pulls himself out of the spiral staircase.

“Jenova. Did you find anything, Zack?” He asks, fiddling with his bang. It’s comforting to do, especially now that he knows it’s something he got from his mother. It’s as though she’s still here with him.

“Nah,” He glances down at the few books held in his arms, “Only some journals she co-authored, but nothing written *just* by her. Considering she apparently spent a lot of time here, that’s a bit surprising.”

Sephiroth frowns, tilting his head in consideration. He doesn’t remember much of his time in that Jenova-induced *haze,* but he does think he would have been more willing to believe himself human had he found anything written by a female scientist. It’s not something he likes to consider, but Shinra only tends to have them near important projects regarding Jenova for one reason.

He’s only encountered one female scientist with a high enough

ranking to actually be able to be featured on a project of this scale once in his life, and Gillian Hewley was there for one purpose and one purpose alone.

To provide the child.

“It must be intentional. I would have gotten suspicious if I saw anything written by a female scientist in the basement, knowing this company's track record.” It’s upsetting to think about how easily he would have considered it.

Zackary’s eyes burrow into him as if they’re coming through every inch of his soul. People have told him that it’s uncomfortable looking *him* in the eyes, as though the puppy isn’t right there with a stare that can humble even the strongest man.

“It’s *always* Hojo.”

…Indeed it is. Chaos glances between them both with humor in his eyes. “If you two are done, we have a Calamity to destroy.”

They get going. The pathway up the mountain isn’t hard to traverse without a guide, so long as you’ve made the trek enough times. Chaos, with a sickening *crunch,* summons a wing out of his father’s back.

He wonders if Vincent is doing alright. The WEAPON had taken control fairly suddenly, after all, and it’s not as though he’d quite gotten around to explaining how their connection works.

“I’ll scope out ahead. You two catch up.”

With that, he and Zack are left to follow the same path they traversed once upon a time, in a comfortable silence. It's nice to have the chance to organize his thoughts. Though he loves his friend, he can be a bit… overbearing at times.

They spend about thirty minutes like this, merely basking in each other's company while making their way up the steep slopes, until they're interrupted by the sound of wing beats.

It's not Chaos.

Genesis and Angeal land in front of them, the latter glancing around as though they're going to be ambushed at any time.

This didn't happen in the other timeline.

Have they really changed so much that these two would seek them out before their time? That they would willingly come down and interact with them despite their suspicions? He can't bring himself to feel hope. All that greets him is dread.

Genesis is up to something - he just *knows* it.

"Sephiroth and the puppy… how pleased to make your acquaintance. It's been a while hasn't it?" The Red Commander says, a pleasant smile on his face despite the bite in his words.

He frowns at them. "It has. How have you both been?"

No matter what his opinions may be regarding their actions, it's best to be polite. If they manage to change *anything,* he would certainly hope it ended up being these two's fates.

A scoff. "Why would you care? You've been so quick to replace us with Angeal's puppy, after all."

'It's just the degradation speaking.' He reminds himself. Not his (former) friend. Even at his most abrasive, the man had *known* that Sephiroth cared about him. "I have not. He was upset over the loss of his mentor, and I was upset over the loss of my friends. It's only natural that we tried to help each other handle it."

"Besides," He stops for a moment, glancing at Angeal. "I was worried how he might handle his mentor *abandoning* him to the mercy of a summon in the middle of *Wutai."*

A wince. *Good,* the man knows he messed up.

"Well now, isn't that a bit cruel to bring up? *Infinite in mystery is the gift of the Goddess…* have you ever considered that Angeal might have had a plan? Or that the summon was never going to kill him?"

"Loveless, act one. Had you been in that situation, would you have been willing to take that chance?" He pauses, waiting for a response that never comes. "I thought not. You're many things, Genesis, but reckless isn't one of them." He says, shaking his head with a sigh. Why is it that people are so insistent on him *knowing the future?*

If anything, Zackary's the one who can do that.

Speaking of the puppy, he’s standing there with the most *heart wrenching* expression on his face. He’s staring at Angeal with so much sadness in his eyes he finds himself almost subconsciously pulling him into a hug.

He swore a few days ago that he’d be there for Zack.

Now’s the time to follow through.

Chapter End Notes

> oh noooooo..... genesis and angeal..... anyways there was a line in this chapter that google docs was terrifyingly determined to correct into an objectively Wrong sentence. so. don't always do as google tells you to!!!!

Zack - Feelings

Chapter Summary

Zack is upset. No, angry. No, sad. No-

He isn't doing alright.

Chapter Notes

the prophesied chapter.... i really step up my game after this one!!! banger lines incoming. i think i was half asleep while writing this and mayhaps like 2 steps away from transcending the mortal plane.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seph's chest is warm. You'd think the guy would run cold, what with how much time he spends cooped up inside the freezing Shinra building, but he's actually a furnace.

Zack's mind latches on to the train of thought with a desperation that almost terrifies him.

Why is it that things *always* happen at Nibelheim? Confrontation, damnation, cruelty rendered visible to the naked eye through those *terrible* books. Something about this town *has* to be cursed.

It's not surprising that they'd run into Genesis and Angeal here. That happened the last time, and here the two of them *knew* one of them had eyes on them.

Still.

Seeing Angeal again, whole and, although degrading, *alive,* hurt. More than he was expecting.

Like tearing open a barely healed wound, he feels seventeen again. Seventeen and being forced to fight and slash and *slice* until the man who was practically a second father to him fell before his blade.

Until death claimed the man and left his murderer to mourn.

It was what Angeal wanted. Yet the man never once considered that there might've been another way, that he could've had *anyone* other than his student become his executioner. That although death is a freedom from the cruelty of the world, to live is to face it and continue going *anyways.*

Ha. Somehow he always gets like this when he thinks of the man. All poetic and shit. Maybe it's because of all those philosophy books Angeal forced him to read.

Sephiroth is saying something to the two of them, his voice hard. Zack only manages to drag himself out of his thoughts enough to hear the tail-end of it, turning to face them both.

"-and despite how much you *know* he cares about you, you still abandoned him to the wolves without a second thought. You call yourself a monster because of a *mutation,* yet the only truly monstrous thing about you is how it took you until *now* to feel guilty about it."

Angeal sighs. It's the tired one he always- no. He doesn't want to get lost in memories a year-and-a-half past for his mind and yet just a few days ago for this body.

"You need to understand, I couldn't just leave Genesis-"

“So you left me instead?”

It comes out quiet, shakier than he hoped it would be. Zack wishes he’d sounded *strong,* like he had taken all that sadness and shoved it aside to do something worth *doing,* but instead he just sounded like that scared little kid running to his parents because he had a bad dream.

He takes a deep breath, gathering together what little determination he has to face the man who damned him, but before he can say anything Angeal starts talking.

“...You could handle yourself. You were capable enough at Fort Tamblin, so I saw no need in accompanying you back.” It’s gentle, placating, the same tone he always used to use when trying to get Zack to understand something that he just *couldn’t.*

And it *pisses him off.* That determination flares into white-hot rage, his grief evaporating like water placed before the might of the sun. Fire *burns* in his chest, as agonizing and twisted as the flames that once consumed the village barely a half hour hike down the mountain.

Zack’s been told he’s impulsive all his life. Quick to anger, hard to calm, and a downright *force of nature* when he didn’t get his way. He’d been better since joining Shinra, with Angeal’s gentle nature and firm guidance to steer him to better outlets other than violence.

But although to the man it’s only been a few days, to *him* it's been well over a year.

That’s a long time to try and hold onto the teachings of a dead man.

Peeling away from Sephiroth, who'd had his arm still firmly wrapped around his shoulders, he stalks his way over to his former mentor, a haunting choir of his own cries and sleepless nights echoing in his ears. He could handle himself?

Was that the same thought that echoed in Angeal's head as he faced him in that bathhouse?

He could handle himself?

"If I could handle myself," He *hisses,* feeling his arms tremble as he gets within range from the sheer *force* it takes to hold himself back, "then why did I nearly *die* to that Ifrit summon? If I could *handle myself,* then why did I almost die to those anti-SOLDIER weapons?"

He's barely a foot away from Angeal now. Every *inch* of his body *screams* at him to fight, to claw and kick and *bite* and *tear* and *brutalize* this man, to make him an *example* of what could've happened in that jungle.

But he doesn't listen. Those sleepless nights of frustration *(Angeal wouldn't leave us! He wouldn't!),* of sadness *(He'll come back. Please, come back.),* of *grief (I killed him! I felt his ribs crack from the blade, I felt his blood run down my hands and soak into my skin, it won't go away no matter how hard I scrub-)* , make him pause, just for a moment, as he considers.

He couldn't handle himself.

"I *hate you.* You left me, *alone,* in enemy territory. I would've died if Sephiroth didn't save me. You left *him* alone too. How could you do

that? *How could you?"*

The *crack* of Angeal's nose as he breaks it doesn't feel satisfying. It used to be, when he was younger, to feel the *crunch,* the way the cartilage caved beneath his fist. He's punching a sick man who's falling apart on a cellular level. *Nothing* about this feels good to him.

"I can't even feel *comforted* by doing that. Why can't I *like* hurting you? It's the only way I can, and it doesn't even give me the kindness of feeling *good?"*

As quick as it came, the anger's gone, replaced by a yawning feeling of emptiness.

"I'm angry." He says, though the hot feeling of tears trailing down his face says otherwise. "I'm angry and I *hate you,* but Gaia knows that this isn't how I want to live. Just go away. Please. Leave on *our* terms this time."

It's quiet as he turns away and walks back to Sephiroth, letting himself collapse into the man's arms as though there's no more strength left in his body. Maybe there isn't.

"Zack…" Angeal says, voice a bit nasally. Ha. Maybe the damage'll be permanent, like the wound on Genesis' shoulder. Maybe it'll remind him of this *every time* he looks in the mirror.

"Let's go, Angeal. We aren't wanted here. *That much* is obvious. *All that awaits you is a somber morrow,* should either of us choose to stay. They've made that clear."

A pause, and then the fluttering of wings.

They didn't *have* to go. Did he even *want* them to? They're supposed to be trying to *fix* the future, to *save* everyone, and yet here he is, sending away two of the people they're supposed to be helping. How can he be a hero if all that he leaves in his wake are the dead?

Sephiroth gently nudges his shoulder, drawing him out of his chest. He's gotten tears all over him. "Sorry, man. Didn't mean to make a mess all over you."

He shakes his head. "No. It's alright, Zackary. It was the least I could do. We… *do* ought to get moving now. Perhaps it'll take your mind off of things?"

Right. Jenova. Of course. He could use a distraction right about now.

"Yeah. Let's go. I don't- I don't want to stay here anymore."

Chapter End Notes

> if i tried to talk about a single favorite line from this chapter it would probably have to be 'how can he be a hero if all that he leaves in his wake are the dead?' i feel like it's such an interesting way of discussing zacks character. i'm not good at analysis but what i do know is that i ate and left no crumbs with this one.

Sephiroth - Jenova

Chapter Summary

After what happened... a distraction is sorely needed.

Chapter Notes

sephiroth king of changing the subject. don't mind him he's unprepared for this kind of responsibility he only realized he was a person like. yesterday

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If there were any words fit to describe what had just happened, Sephiroth finds himself lacking knowledge of any of them.

He'd expected Zack to be upset, certainly - the boy had every *right* to be - but the sheer *rage* that had bled off of him… it was almost visible.

It had almost *terrified* him.

Still, he sticks close to his friend. With the way he's shaking now, the ordeal had been exhausting. Perhaps he should have him rest, rather than face Jenova? He loathes bringing up the topic though… It might be best to let *Zack* decide when he's fit for a break.

They continue the path up the mountain. It had taken them only a couple of hours the last time they were here, though a large portion of the time had been taken up by the detour brought about from the collapsed bridge.

"I do hope the bridge stays standing, this time." He comments, staring at the offending object as though it could crumble at any moment. Which… isn't impossible.

It makes Zackary snort, though, so it served a purpose. He hadn't intended it to be funny. "Not likely. Here, look at the ropes. They're a lot fresher than they were when it fell… must've been damaged from a storm not long before we got there."

Interesting. Sephiroth hadn't noticed that. "How can you tell?"

"We use a similar kind of bridge to navigate the jungles in Gongaga. Lightning, even if it doesn't strike it directly, can mess these things up *badly.* Don't even get me started on how long it takes to make sure they're all safe *afterwards.* Bridge repairs practically a whole *career path."*

"I see. I'd like to see it for myself one day. I hear Gongaga can be quite gorgeous."

Zack grins at him. The sight of his friend being happy again makes something in his chest ease up. Sadness doesn't suit him. "Oh I am *absolutely* taking you there. My mom and dad would *love* you."

Would they? Considering their son is so… Well, *himself,* he finds himself smiling at the thought. "It'd be nice to meet them. Perhaps they have some tips on how to deal with the sheer amount of energy you have."

Advice on how to handle Zackary's excitability would be nice. The puppy is… exhausting, at times.

"Hey! I'm not *that* bad!" A pause, and then a bit quieter, "am I?"

Sephiroth shakes his head rapidly. “Of course not!” Gaia, could he have said anything *worse?* The boy’s already had a rough day! “I was merely joking. I’m quite fond of how energetic you are.”

Zack lights up. “That’s good. We should keep moving- Chaos’ waiting for us, isn’t he?”

The WEAPON *should* be on his way back to them, actually.

They get moving. Sephiroth finds himself wondering, as a result of the silence… What was it like for him when he made his way up the mountain after *slaughtering* Nibelheim?

What was on his mind? Was it only Jenova? Did Zackary even cross his mind, or was any thought of the boy crushed beneath the Calamity’s heel? How did he excuse the blood on his blade?

Shaking his head, he keeps an eye on the sky. Chaos is bound to arrive soon, seeing as he was supposed to meet them on their way up. It’s only a matter of- there.

The figure of his father becomes visible, peeling away from the shadows as though he’s splitting off another part of himself. His eyes are back to the familiar red.

“Chaos informed me of what your goals are. I can’t say for certain that I approve of either of you going somewhere you could get hurt… but I don’t suppose I could stop you either way.” It’s soft, in what he’s beginning to recognize as his father’s voice, rather than the harsher tones that the WEAPON prefers.

Sephiroth nods. “You couldn’t. We’re almost there, by the looks of it. Let us arrive before sundown.”

He wonders if their Turk entourage is still following them. It’s entirely possible that Chaos could’ve… taken *care* of them, but he’d rather not consider that outcome. Though they can be irritating, he’s grown fond of them over the years.

It’s not long until they’re at the reactor.

“Man. Was this thing *always* so ominous? Feels like I'm getting chills just being nearby.” Zack comments, rubbing his arms.

He almost wants to do the same. Something about it… he can feel the hairs on the back of his neck standing up.

Something deep in his soul screams at him to *run.*

But he refuses.

He will not leave this monster to harm the people. He will not leave it there to be used to make another Genesis, another Angeal, another *him.*

“Let’s destroy it quickly. We can’t risk there being a distress signal built into its life support.”

The sight of the plaque bearing the Calamity’s name doesn’t enthrall him the way it did last time. It doesn’t knock his soul ajar, leaving just

enough room for a parasite to weasel its way in and make itself at home. All it does is serve as a sign to summon Masamune and have her cleave the lock holding them out in two.

She hums at the action. He wonders if she did the same back in-

He shouldn't get distracted. There is a mission he must fulfill.

The effigy is torn asunder as easy as breathing, except this time he is aware of his father and friend at either side, hands on their weapons and materia and the sound of the Planets blood swaying beneath them as though it was *singing.* Is it joyful? Sorrowful?

It must be joy. Why would She mourn the death of this being?

A faint ache in the back of his head is the only sign of any influence Jenova could have over him. Its voice goes unheard, the siren song unable to dig deep enough into his soul to get any control over him.

"It's time."

They use their materia- ones they didn't even know they had. Pale white orbs drawn from the Lifestream *(lesser versions of Holy, something in him sings)* respond to him and Zack as though they were extensions of their bodies, beating in tandem with their hearts and humming in their minds, making them feel as though they're a part of this planetary choir.

He doesn't even register what's going on until it's already done. Was he even truly in control, or did She command Her children to purge this taint?

The materias dissolve in their hands. It reminds him faintly of the one he saw with Aerith, though that one's glow was a thousand times brighter and seemed to radiate *power* in a way these ones did not.

Vincent watches them both stand there for a moment, watching the empty chamber where Jenova used to lay.

“Let’s turn off the reactor and then get out of here. I am *exhausted.”*

Sephiroth wholeheartedly agrees with Zack’s statement, and since no one has any objections that is *exactly* what they do. It’ll be a cold day in hell before he ever comes up here again.

Chapter End Notes

> the best way of explaining what happened with the materia and jenova is that the Planet used them as conduits of Her power. they had versions of Holy that the Planet formed (since they were in such close proximity to Her blood) and essentially. vaporized. jenova. you'd think this would be the penultimate battle of the story but uh. no theres a lot left actually. this is moreso about the like character growth than the defeat of any real enemy

Sephiroth - Travel

Chapter Summary

Talks are had, plans are made, and, really, reactors are weird.

Chapter Notes

i like this chapter. feel like it sets up some stuff really well. hope you guys do too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When he wakes up on a thin mattress in that accursed mansion, it's not to the *sun* or anything he would rather be waking up to. Instead it's because Zack is pacing around their room with a wild look in his eyes, muttering something intelligible.

"Zackary? Are you alright?"

The boy doesn't even pause to glance at him. Is this what it was like, seeing him in that basement?

Sephiroth stands up, shaking his shoulder. *That,* of all things, is what gathers Zack's attention. "Hm? Oh, sorry, did I wake you up Seph?"

"Yes. Are you alright? You were pacing around, muttering to yourself. It was…" Concerning isn't even *half* of it. The puppy blinks, and then smiles. "Oh! I just had a weird dream, is all. Lots of crystals… I think there was a lady stuck inside one of them? It reminds me of the dreams I usually have that *might* actually be from the Planet now that I think about it…"

He trails off, muttering something. Sephiroth tilts his head in confusion. Planet-sent dreams? He'd heard folk tales that dreams were one of the Planet's main means of communication with the Cetra, but

Aerith seemed to experience otherwise from what he saw of it… Perhaps it was on a person to person basis? Or maybe something that depended on the region they were from?

"You in there bud? Looking a bit lost in thought." Zack says, drawing him out of his thoughts.

He nods. "I'm in here. Just… What do you think that dream could be about? What did the lady look like?" It must be relevant to them in some way, otherwise… Why show it to them?

Tilting his head, it takes a moment for Zack to respond. "Uh… I *think* her hair was brown? Pretty long, held up in a… green ribbon? It might've been yellow, actually, since the crystal looked blue. She… *might've* had a labcoat on? Or a white dress. Maybe blue. I couldn't really see much."

What?

He pulls the photo, worn and aged, out of his breast pocket. He shows it to the boy with a desperation that surprises even *him.* "Did she look like this? Anything at all?"

A pause, then a hesitant nod. "From what I could see, yeah. Doesn't look like she aged a day. Why do you ask?"

"Zack. That's my *mother.* That means she's *alive.* Could you see anything that was indicative of where it was?"

The boy shakes his head. "It was in a cave. That could mean *anywhere.* "

Just as it had risen, his hopes for getting to meet her, face to face, are crushed. It would take them a lifetime to find the cavern she could be in, and that's thinking with optimism. Surely the Planet wouldn't give him this hope just to crush it. *Surely*.

His father speaks up. When did he get here? Sephiroth swears he never heard the door open… "Perhaps you could speak with the Planet and request more details? I don't see how She would deny one of Her children such a small request, especially after what you've done for Her."

Right.

Of course. She would have a reason for this.

"Does that mean we should head back to Midgar? That's where Aerith's church is." Zack questions. Vincent shakes his head. "After what we've just done, that'd be a death sentence. It'd be best to find somewhere to lie low for a while."

Somewhere else… The boy did mention not too long ago that he wanted… "We should go to Gongaga."

Zack blinks. "You sure that won't be too obvious? They'd expect me to go home, right?"

Sephiroth nods. "They would. However, from what you've said it seems like our best bet in contacting the Planet directly. You mentioned something in the church… about a Nana Neith? Do you think she might be able to help us?" The boy tilts his head. He really has a habit of doing that, doesn't he? It's really not surprising where

the puppy nickname came from.

"Probably. She's been around for like, *ever.* Even the elders talk about her being their Nana since they were *kids.* "

That's… hm. There's something about that which unnerves him. Either way… "If no one else has any better ideas, then we should start traveling now. It's best we leave before they manage to catch up with us."

They're out of that cursed town in record time, and by now Sephiroth is certain that their Turk trails are long dead.

It's not as though they'd have let them leave without a fight otherwise.

Nothing of note happens for the first few hours. They make the trek down the Nibel mountains (he swears to himself that he will *never* step foot on them again, what with how they seem to bathe all who come near in *horrible* luck) in silence, largely, only interrupted by Zack's quiet mutterings as he guides them with a map.

That he didn't have when they got here.

Sephiroth's long since learned that it's best to avoid questioning the boy though. If it helps them, it helps them, after all, and their only other option is wandering around blindly.

It's around the fifth hour that a question pops into his head. "Why is it that the reactor for Nibelheim was built in such an inconvenient location? Surely it could've been built closer to the village."

Vincent hums. “It was purposeful. Not only was its main purpose to contain Jenova, but it was also built on Mako-rich land that many Nibel natives considered to be sacred ground. At least- prior to Shinra standardizing many belief systems and educational institutions. I believe this to be the case of many reactors.”

“I see… Is it much the same with Gongaga, Zackary?”

The man in question blinks for a moment, then glances at him over his shoulder. “Uh… sorta. Gongaga’s an isolated village, y’see, so we mostly just kinda… kept doing what we always did. The reactor definitely upset a *lot* of people though.”

He pauses, glancing at the map for a moment. “No one really uses its power unless it’s an emergency. Makes ‘em feel *sick.* Like, not *sick* sick, but uneasy. Disjointed. Lots of babies died when it was first activated. Nana Neith said it was because it sucked the life out of them.”

“That’s… morbid.” He blinks, furrowing his brows as a thought occurs to him. “Did she tell you this when you were a *child?”*

“Yeah. Apparently kids born afterwards weren’t like the ones that everyone was used to. Less interested in the world. In life. She said it stole their *‘greenblood’,* which I guess has something to do with their connection to the planet.”

The conversation goes quiet after that. He can’t help but wonder… were there more Cetra left in the world before the reactors? If this… *Nana Neith* is correct, that would mean that Shinra is the reason there are so few of them left. It’s their own fault they thought Aerith was the last one.

It’s a good few minutes of walking later that Zack pipes up. “We’ll have to take a detour through Cosmo Canyon for supplies. Think we should get there in like… a day or two? If we go fast.”

Sephiroth smiles. “Then let's go fast. I have to admit… I’ve always wanted to visit.”

Chapter End Notes

> next stop: cosmo canyon! also i took the chance to add some worldbuilding bc i feel like theres no conceivable way that aerith is the LAST ancient because they all died out. there has to be something else involved

Angeal - Monster

Chapter Summary

Angeal has a lot to think about. Genesis doesn't really help.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Angeal laid awake that night, the same he had for the past… three? He's not entirely certain anymore, at this point.

Every time he closes his eyes, the words just play on loop. *("I hate you. You left me, alone, in enemy territory. I would've died if Sephiroth didn't save me. You left him alone too. How could you do that? How could you?")*

He hadn't…

But he had. He'd *left* Zack there, hadn't he? He'd abandoned them both to be with Genesis. He'd outright *stated* that his friendship with the man was more important than his student's *life*.

How *could* he?

Sephiroth had so few friends. So few, in fact, that he was willing to tolerate the type of person he usually *despised* for the sake of companionship. Angeal had looked at the two of them interacting in that apartment, and so he couldn't even manage to convince himself it was merely a matter of him… trying to make them feel guilty.

Which is what Genesis seems to be trying to convince himself.

“Wallowing in your despair again? *My friend, the fates are cruel…* surely you know there was no chance of the puppy dying in Wutai. You aren’t *that* careless.” Chimes the man in question, glancing at him from his perch on the windowsill of their latest haunt.

Shaking his head, he walks over to the chair nearby, cringing as his wings hit the hard back. Still not a sensation he’ll ever get used to. He hopes Hollander finds a cure soon- he doesn’t know how much longer he can stand to look at them.

They’re just another reminder that he’s a monster.

“He wasn’t *wrong,* is the thing. I hadn’t figured Sephiroth was going to show up. I *left* him there, fully aware that there was a chance he would *die.* It seemed reasonable at the time, he’s incredibly strong, but looking back on it…” It’s no *wonder* Zack would be angry at him. He’d have been the same, if their situations were reversed.

Genesis looks at him for a moment, before sighing. “I suppose that *would* weigh on your mind, what with your obsession with *honor* and everything. If it’s any consolation, I’m not entirely certain he truly *meant* what he said.”

“What?” It sure *sounded* like he did, and considering how Zack’s previous *episodes* usually occurred *(One moment, he’d been about to chastise a few recruits who were bothering an infantryman, the next Zack had thrown himself at them with reckless violence that was completely unexpected from the usually kindhearted boy)…* he figured it would be the case.

Whatever he does or says during those moments comes from the heart, according to him.

His friend laughs. “You *saw* how close he was with Sephiroth.” Oh. It’s this again, isn’t it? “It wouldn’t surprise me if he had been *made* to do such a thing.”

A glance at the man’s slightly glassy eyes tells him that it’s another one of *those* days, ones where he’s just a bit more prone to the sorts of thoughts he’d usually deem idiotic at best, and absolutely *insane* at worst.

“Genesis,” he sighs, “we’ve been *over* this. Sephiroth isn’t the type to use psychological warfare. If he wanted us to feel guilty, he’d *tell us.”* Angeal turns to look out the window. Nothing’s noteworthy about it, but anything’s better than the reminder of how much the degradation has ruined his friend. Ruined them *both.*

Made them into monsters.

“Hah. As if Sephiroth would ever take the easy way out. He loathes us, you know. He must be overjoyed that we’re gone, you know.” A quick peek at his friends eyes shows that they’re still glassy, yet lit up by an almost *manic* intensity. *“The one that is left becomes a hero…* It must be great for him, with us gone. Nothing to rival him. Nothing to challenge him.”

He almost goes to argue with him, but… what’s the point? It’s not as though there’s any use trying to convince him. Genesis gets worse by the *day,* and it’s entirely possible that whatever progress they make now will be gone by sunrise.

You can’t reason with madness.

Sighing, he moves back to the rickety bed he'd claimed as his own. "I'm gonna try and get some sleep."

"Goodnight, Angeal."

…

His dreams aren't pleasant.

Although he manages to *get* to sleep - that's half the challenge, these days - *staying* that way is another thing entirely.

Things conjured up by his dying body… the memories of the people under his command being slayed in Wutai… *Zack*… all of them haunt him during this time. It's as though the universe itself is trying to make him suffer for what he's done. What he's had a hand in.

For existing.

It's a strange thing to consider. Whether something out there truly *does* have a hand in deciding whether you suffer or live your life in peace. It makes him wonder… if something like that is truly how the world works, what did he do to incur its wrath?

How can he pay penance for a sin he doesn't recall committing?

Is it the circumstances of his birth, being born containing Jenova cells? Or is it because he's worked with Shinra, which has ruined so many lives?

Is he deemed responsible for sins not his own simply because of that? Or is it a divine punishment handed down from incarnation to incarnation, merely because sometime a thousand years ago he angered the wrong deity?

He almost sounded like Genesis there, for a second. He's not usually the religious type, but perhaps his friend has… rubbed off on him a bit, over the course of a lifetime spent together.

He huffs a laugh to himself, heart feeling just that little bit lighter at the thought of how the man might react at learning that he *does,* actually, have an influence over his friends.

Pulling himself out of the bed, Angeal decides to go find Hollander. They'd originally been making their way to Banora, to use some of the old labs there, but the detour Genesis insisted on taking after learning Zack and Sephiroth were making their way to Nibelheim for some *strange* reason had forced them to make use of an even *older* lab here instead.

The man is little help.

Though the equipment certainly is a factor in things, it wouldn't be much of a surprise if the man had no idea what to do to help them.

It doesn't seem like something any sane person would *prepare* for, in any case, though he gets the feeling that Professor Hojo might've had a better idea. If only the man was willing to speak to any product of the Jenova Project *other* than Sephiroth. Perhaps…

Another laugh. Perhaps things *are* looking up. Zack's words from a few

days ago seem so far away… of course, the thought of them still makes his heart clench, but…

It’s almost as though he’s managed to look past them, in a way.

Is this how Genesis feels, whenever the madness sets in? Ah… such is the fate of a monster, he supposes.

Chapter End Notes

> the second batch of edited chapters. maybe i'll finish them all now. if i do, you probably know because i suddenly started posting every day

Zack - Cosmo Canyon

Chapter Summary

Cosmo Canyon!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Zack has seen a *lot* of things during his time as a SOLDIER, but he never quite manages to bring himself to get used to just how different the landscapes of some places can be.

The canyons of… well, *Cosmo Canyon,* are so different in appearance to the Gongagan jungles he lived in for half his life that he has to do a double take at just how much *orange* he sees. “Man. I don’t think I’ll ever *not* be surprised at seeing a desert.”

Sephiroth glances at him. “What do you mean, Zackary?”

He really needs to get the man to stop calling him his full name one of these days. “It’s just- Gongaga looks *so* different. It’s weird seeing something that’s the complete opposite to the jungles *this* close by. Wonder how *that* happened…”

It’s a good question! How does something as lush as Gongaga manage to exist in such close proximity to such a vast desert? Does it have something to do with the Cetra, or is it just one of those weird nature things?

Probably a weird combination of both.

They get weird looks as they head into the village proper (not

surprising, honestly), and he has to grab Sephiroth's hand to keep him from veering off towards the market. "Let's at least get a room first, alright Seph?"

The look he's given in response is so pathetic he almost lets go of him. He probably looks somewhat similar, considering the three of them have been making their way through plains and then the desert for the past… few days? It's been a while.

"He's correct. Besides, though rivers may suffice away from civilization, you both should take a shower." Sephiroth's dad chimes in from behind them, and he damn near *jumps* out of his skin in shock.

Turning around, a key is shoved in his free hand. "I will acquire something to eat and some new clothes for you both. In the meantime, take a shower." It's not a request.

"...You've got it, man!"

They make their way to the inn, figuring out the location of their room and practically collapsing onto the bed. "Seph."

A grunt from the other bed.

"Is it just me, or is this bed the most comfortable thing in the universe?" His only answer is *another* grunt. He feels that in his soul.

Standing up, he absently turns on the shower and cleans off the grime their periodic dips in the rivers didn't manage. He finds himself staring at the SOLDIER uniform he's been wearing this entire time, the only distraction from his thoughts the warm water running down his back.

Man. He ran away from home to join Shinra, and now he's run away from Shinra to come home.

How long's it been since he saw his parents? He writes to them every month or so, and he'd been *considering* taking a vacation to go see them after Nibelheim (in their old time, anyways), but…

He could've died in that reactor. He could've died and they would never get to see the man he grew into- knowing Shinra, probably never even see his body again, not even for a burial. Would the company even bother to give them his ashes?

Would they even bother cremating him? He'd *thought* they would, but then he met Vincent…

Shaking his head, he turns off the water and puts on the clean clothes that *weren't there* when he walked in. Seph's dad is *creepy*.

The clothes are comfortable though, he'll give the guy that. He has good taste.

Even though it's like, twenty years out of date.

"Shower's free!" He calls out, toweling his hair dry as he walks into the main area. Sephiroth is hunched over a plate of food like it's the only thing in the world that matters (and from the way that smells, he *totally* agrees), while Vincent is reading something in the corner.

He heads to the bed he claimed and finds a plate sitting atop the

nightstand, still warm and obviously fresh from the kitchens.

Digging in, he finds that the taste is remarkably similar to some of the foods that he ate as a child in Gongaga. Is it because of the two regions being so close together?

Probably. Though a few of the flavors are different, it's close enough that something about it soothes his heart. Before he knows it, the plate's been wiped clean and the shower's running in the background.

It's only him and Vincent left in the room.

Awkward.

"So, uh… see anything interesting while you were out?"

Red glowing eyes glance up at him for a moment. "...A firewolf cub. It's not everyday you see one of them, especially without their parents."

Hm. That name sounds… actually, no. He doesn't recognize it. "Cool. This place is famous for its observatories, right?"

"Among other things. It's one of the only places left on the planet without Shinra influence. From what I've gathered… it's the birthplace of many anti-Shinra groups."

Oh. Like AVALANCHE?

Zack supposes that it doesn't really surprise him. He doesn't think he's ever seen this many windmills in one place. Is that how they generate power?

When he voices this question, Sephiroth's dad snorts. "I keep forgetting you live in a world where Reactors are believed to be the only method of powering things. But yes, your guess is correct. Many places used to power themselves with this method, especially back in the time of the Republic, but after Shinra's conquest it's fallen by the wayside."

It's like a history lesson, except it somehow manages to be *interesting.* Maybe it's because the topic is something he's actually curious about?

Something about school just doesn't manage to focus him quite like things about nature. He remembers his parents had to put *everything* in the context of monsters or plants in order to get him to pay attention.

("Zackary Fair! What do I always say about playing around in the trees unsupervised?"

"That it's like playing with a Touch Me frog! Sure, it might not turn you into a frog, but it's better to be safe than sorry."

"That's right. Don't do it again, son.")

He shakes his head as though it'll clear away the memories.

"I'm glad Seph's gonna get to go to Gongaga. From what I know, the most lush area he's ever been in was Wutai." And there wasn't much time for sightseeing there.

A hum. “If you wouldn’t mind me asking, I’ve got a question for you.”

“Go ahead.” The guy’s been a big help, so it’s the least he can do.

“You and Sephiroth seem quite familiar with each other despite the difference in age. Might I ask how you met?”

Ah. Shit.

Chapter End Notes

> hahahahahahahahaha i remember being really conflicted about whether i should have him learn about it or not, but i eventually decided they had no real reason to hide it from him

Sephiroth - Human

Chapter Summary

> He considers things a bit. Really, the situation is pretty weird, isn't it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sephiroth can’t deny that the shower was *absolutely* necessary. It reminds him quite a bit of how it felt after a long-term mission in Wutai, returning to his apartment to shower off grime he could never quite get to in the camps.

Though its pleasant nature doesn’t quite manage to draw his thoughts away from what led them on this journey in the first place. They destroyed Jenova, so now they’re trying to find his mother.

Then what?

What do they do *afterwards?*

He doesn’t seem to have the same kind of connection to the Planet that Zack and Aerith do. He’s never heard Her speak to him the same way the other two have. Is it because he was tainted by those cells?

Will he ever hear Her voice? Interact with her beyond a strange materia and a will not quite his own?

Thoughts of that loop back around to his mother. If she was a Cetra, why did she agree to the Jenova project? Why would she have been willing to have the Calamity placed within herself? Within her *son?*

Something about it just doesn't seem to add up.

Shaking his head, Sephiroth sighs and turns off the water, putting on clean clothes and wrapping his hair in a towel. They'll find her, and all his questions will be answered. That's about all that he can expect at this point.

Zackary glances at him with a slightly panicked look when he steps out of the restroom. It immediately sets him on edge. "Is everything alright in here?"

His father glances at him. "I was simply asking him how you two are such close friends."

Ah.

That would be a bit panic worthy, wouldn't it? If they told the man a lie it'd be unlikely for him to believe it (both because he's a former Turk and since Zack is… calling him a terrible liar would be putting things *simply),* yet it wouldn't be likely he'd believe the *truth,* either.

It's similar to the saying 'stuck between a rock and a hard place.'

Well. Not as though they can try to come up with something on the spot, and really, letting his father know the truth doesn't seem like it could cause too much trouble in the long run.

"We are from two years in the future, give-or-take a few months."

The look on Zackary's face is… entertaining, to say the least. Had he not destroyed his PHS to be rid of what's most certainly a tracking device, he'd even be inclined to take a picture or two to send to his cousin. It seems like she'd enjoy getting to see that.

"I thought we were keeping it a secret!" The boy whisper-yells (a double entendre, certainly, but the most fitting way to describe *whatever* he just did) as Vincent blinks a few times.

Clearing his throat, his father speaks. "I… suppose that doesn't surprise me quite as much as it should. It explains quite a bit, really."

They haven't exactly been subtle.

"So… we can just tell him everything, then? I'm guessing we can."

He smiles, nodding at Zack. "We can. Do try to be cautious, however. There's no telling whether someone could be listening in." A thumbs up is the only response he gets as his friend (best friend, really, the boy deserves that title after everything) busies himself with telling his father what's happened.

Meanwhile, he extracts his hair from the towel and begins to brush it. It's a novel feeling, being able to look at it and know it's a combination of his parents.

Sephiroth finds that he quite likes it.

Though he usually leaves it down, he decides to braid it overnight. It

takes up a fair bit of time (time that he used to spend doing other things), but it's worth not having to deal with it being quite as messy in the morning.

Maybe it'll have some waves in it from the braid? The idea, though simple, excites him. It's the first real alteration to his appearance that he's *ever* had a say in. Hojo had always-

Shaking his head before he can follow that line of thought any further, he ties off the end of the braid and swings it back over his shoulder, directing his attention to Masamune. She's well overdue for a good polishing.

Pulling her out, he smiles slightly at the shine on her blade. Genesis had always thought it weird that he acted as though she was *alive,* but the man could never have understood the connection between them both.

She'd been a part of him, practically an extension of himself, since he was four, though he'd never been allowed to wield her until he was an appropriate height. Despite that, nearly every waking moment for many of his earlier years that wasn't spent in the labs was spent with him speaking to her, cleaning her, getting to know every inch of her blade.

That's without mentioning the legends tied to her.

He hums a song he'd once heard somewhere on one of Midgar's upper plates as he smoothes a cloth over her until the blade gleams.

Yes, Masamune is most certainly alive.

No inanimate object would crave blood quite as much.

He's so lost in his thoughts that he almost doesn't notice Zack coming up beside him to still his hand. "Time to head to bed, bud. Got a long day tomorrow."

Right. "Of course." He lets Masamune dematerialize, shifting his supplies off of his bed and onto the floor. He'd hardly even realized he took so many of them out. She must've been in poor condition.

The other two settle into their beds as he turns off the lights, laying down atop his own mattress. It's comfortable, more so than any they've experienced since they were back in Nibelheim, and he finds his eyes being pulled shut of their own volition.

Was he really that exhausted?

Sephiroth isn't quite as surprised at the thought as he ought to be. He's well aware that his stamina has steadily lowered after the removal of the Calamities cells, though the fact he hadn't even *noticed* he was so tired is a bit of a concern…

It's most likely a result of his body still adjusting.

He glances over at Zack, watching a bit as the boy quietly messages Aerith on his PHS, though he looks away before he's spotted.

Perhaps the two will get to marry this time around. That'd be nice. Zackary is dear to him, so having the boy be unequivocally considered family?

The thought is comforting enough that it lulls him to sleep. Truly, there’s nothing he’d like more.

Chapter End Notes

> i vaguely remember writing the part about masamune and then just putting my head in my hands as i came to the conclusion that i'd have to rewrite the entire section if i wanted to even try getting rid of the vaguely romantic undertones. rest assured, there is nothing between him and the sword. i hope nobody actually assumed that was the case.

Zack - Observatory

Chapter Summary

> Cosmo Canyon is infamous for one thing in particular. Also, a certain someone is well overdue for introspective.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Zack had opened his eyes, he'd expected the warm oranges of the room at the inn to greet him. Instead, it's just that crystal cave again.

The wind whistles in his ears, making him shiver (despite the fact he isn't actually *there)* as he looks around. It's clearer, somehow. Where before it was like looking through frosted glass, now it's more like looking through glasses that aren't made for you. You can *see* through them, sure, but it's hard to make out any details.

He breaks through thick and thin strands of lifestream as he makes his way to the lady- probably Seph's *mom*- inside the crystal.

"Hello? Are you awake in there?"

Unlike last time, where he was more an observer than *there,* in a sense, he's actually able to talk. He squints his eyes, but he can't seem to make out any movements. Is she even *alive* ?

Zack sure hopes so, but it doesn't seem likely. Unless it's a sort of cryo-freeze like he sees in those Sci-Fi movies? From what Aerith mentioned, *she* was the Cetra of the parents, so it wouldn't be surprising if the planet had something to do with…

Oh, whatever. If all he can do is make assumptions he's getting nowhere. He quickly makes his way around the cave, searching for any features that might be indicative of the region it's in. Narrowing things down from the *entire planet* to somewhere like Mideel would be good.

Man, if only he read that book about rocks when he was younger. Might've been helpful.

Whatever.

You know, you never realize how long a dream can last until you're fully aware you're dreaming. How long has it been? Zack knows from experience that it could really be anywhere between a few minutes and several hours, but still…

The longer a dream lasts, the more uncomfortable it gets. The more Nana Neith's stories (warnings?) start to become more and more prevalent in his mind. Do not wander where you cannot return from. Do not let yourself sink into dreams without an anchor.

Every time they do, he can swear he feels her eyes (older than her body, older than anything he'd ever seen) burrowing into him with that haunting glow.

How did she know the things she did?

Who even *is* she?

She's been around for as long as anyone in Gongaga knows. Her origins were the hot topic, really. Everyone had their theories. Some

said she was a monster in disguise, others a summon, others a god. The only ones who she truly interacted with were the children, guiding them in ways no one ever really knew. The older they grew the less they remembered what she told them.

Except Zack.

He remembered. He always did. He remembered every last *word.* He didn't really understand them, no, but he *remembered.* The way her voice resounded in his skull like the toll of a bell. The way each sentence etched itself into his brain as though embedding it into stone.

Oh, how it *haunts* him.

He barely notices that he's woken up until he *is,* the starry sky outside the window telling enough of what time it is.

It's early enough in the morning that he makes sure to be quiet as he sneaks over to the pitcher on the table, full of lukewarm water. With his throat feeling as dry as it is, it's practically the best thing he's ever tasted.

It's unlikely he'll manage to get to bed before the others wake up, so he resigns himself to wandering around the village.

Damn near the moment he steps foot on the worn path, staring up at the sky as though it holds the answers he needs (just *what* is going on? Why is he the one being given these dreams?), he's almost knocked flat on the ground as something bright orange slams into his legs.

"Oh! I'm sorry!"

Blinking at the… dog(?) That just *spoke* (what the *hell),* he smiles. “It’s alright. Just pay attention next time. What are you doing up so late?”

They seem to smile back at him. “Couldn’t sleep. Is it the same with you?”

He nods, and their tail starts wagging. “Oh, maybe you could come see grandpa’s observatory! He’s still up, I think. Follow me!”

Well.

It’s something to do?

Zack follows them up the pathways and through the caverns into a lab filled to the brim with all sorts of things. An old man turns to face them as they step in.

“Oh? Is this a new friend, Nanaki? What might your name be?”

He holds out his hand, waiting until the other takes it to start speaking. “I’m Zack. Nanaki found me looking at the sky. Mentioned something about an observatory?”

The man chuckles. “Ah, that boy really likes talking about it, doesn’t he? I’m Bugenhagen, his grandfather. If you’re here for the observatory, it’s right over here.” At that, he follows the other near the strange machine in the middle of the room, blinking in surprise as it starts lifting upwards.

“Are you sure you should be showing me this? What if I was here to steal it or something?”

Bugenhagen laughs into his sleeve. “No one would steal such an old, clunky machine. Nanaki would have noticed if you had bad intentions, anyways. Firewolves have strong noses for that sort of thing.”

Oh. Must be the same one that Vincent mentioned earlier, then. Probably a relative of Nibel Wolves, based on the closeness of the regions and the names.

The machine flares to life and he finds his thoughts brought to a standstill as the stars seem to come alive around him. He can only gape as the planets swirl around him, the galaxy twinkling and *breathing* with such brilliance it takes his breath away.

“It’s gorgeous.”

“Indeed it is, Zack. If you don’t mind an old man for inquiring… you appear to have something on your mind?”

It can’t be *too* bad to tell him about everything, can it? Well, it could, actually, be really bad. Maybe a bit? Just enough to tell *someone?* About the Cetra thing, and the dreams?

If Seph or Vincent were here, he’d probably think twice about it. As things are…

He tells Bugenhagen.

At the end of the story (well, more-so bits and pieces of one), the old man hums. “I see. Perhaps the Planet is trying to tell you something?”

He shrugs. “I figured *that.* It’s just… Why *me?* Why not Sephiroth? It’s *his* mom, after all. Why does it *have* to be me?” They might have already figured out what to do if these were being shown to one of the others instead.

“Maybe the Planet’s trying to get *you* to do something. She works in mysterious ways, after all. It might be something only you can do.”

And isn’t *that* a scary thought.

Chapter End Notes

> this is the one fic where i adressed the plot points i left hanging without having to go back and change large chunks of the story. they grow up so fast T-T

Sephiroth - On the Road

Chapter Summary

The road to Gongaga. Some things need to be said.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing Sephiroth noticed when he woke up was that Zackary was, strangely enough, already awake. Considering that in their entire time of knowing each other he's seen this occurrence a total of… maybe *twice* (though that's pushing it), he immediately goes to ask what's wrong.

"Hm? Oh, yeah. I'm fine, Seph. Just had another one of those dreams. You know how it is."

If that's not a lie, he doesn't know *what* is. Sephiroth lets him be, though… The visions seem to shake the boy in ways little else can, after all, and if it were *truly* serious Zack would tell him.

Still. He resolves to keep an eye on him, just in case.

His father walks in, carrying some food. "The villagers say that there's signs of a sandstorm in the next few days. We ought to leave now, otherwise we'll be delayed a few days." And considering their current situation, a delay wouldn't be helpful one bit.

"That seems best."

They don't linger for long, after that. Finishing the food, spending a bit of the Gil they had on them for some supplies, and then resuming

their trek across the canyon all takes less than an hour.

It's quiet. Zack described the details of the dream to them (Vincent confirming that it *was,* in fact, his mother after hearing the description of a blurry yellow *thing* in her hair), but beyond that there's little to talk about.

His description of how still she was… shaking his head, Sephiroth sighs. She *has* to be alive. The Planet wouldn't be so cruel as to lead him to a corpse.

…Right?

The thought disturbs him, because it *can't* be true, but somehow he just can't manage to get it to leave his mind.

"Is something bothering you, Sephiroth?" His father questions, glancing at him. Zack is at the front, the same way he has been for hours. He's the one who's used this route before, after all.

He looks at Vincent. "I just… I can't stop thinking that she's… that we're going to make it there and all we'll find is her corpse."

The man sighs. "It's… a reasonable concern. I'm sure that isn't the case, though- the Planet is quite fond of Her children, and Chaos especially seems confident that she's alive." Somehow, it's comforting to hear despite the lack of any concrete evidence.

Is that always how it is, with these sorts of fears?

Sephiroth wouldn't know. Hojo (and they ought to deal with him sometime soon, really) did his utmost to ensure that his perfect weapon would *never* be terrified. For the longest time, he'd honestly been surprised *that man* hadn't tried to surgically remove that part of his brain, though really, he shouldn't have been. He'd never do such a thing to his crowning achievement.

"I see. I suppose that's all I needed to hear."

His father smiles at him, before the silence resumes. It's well into the night by the time they get around to stopping to camp, and he can see the faint outlines of the jungle at the edge of the horizon. By this time tomorrow, especially at their current pace (there are shockingly few monsters on the route they've taken… perhaps it's a trade route) they should be nearing the village.

Walking over to Zackary, who'd practically collapsed onto the ground the moment they agreed to stop, he takes a long look at the boy's face.

It's easy to forget that, for all that his mind is that of an adult (though barely), his current body is still a teenagers, and a Second Class at that. He doesn't have the same kind of stamina he and his father do, and he's been keeping up with their pace for the past few days. The break they took in the Canyon wasn't even that long.

"We should take some time to rest after we reach Gongaga. He's been pushing himself too hard to keep up with us."

Vincent nods, stoking the fire a bit more.

There's little else to do other than wallow in his own thoughts, yet even those are something he'd rather avoid.

What do they do after they find his mother?

Do they go and take down Hojo? Take down *Shinra?* Or do they leave, take Aerith and her mother and run off into the woods, living their life free of the company's grasp? He has to admit, the last one is rather tempting.

But…

He can't bring himself to just let things lie. That company has perpetrated untold cruelties, damn near *ruined his life,* and its lies were the reason two of his closest friends died in that other timeline. The reason he very nearly *killed Zack*.

Had he not been told Jenova was his mother, so many things would have been different. What would have happened had he not resisted? What would have happened if he'd instead succumbed to that siren song, taken the wax out of his ears because he was so *desperate* to hear the things he'd always dreamed of with no ropes to tie him down, and lost himself for it?

Sephiroth knows that he'll likely never be able to bring himself to look into the eyes of the Nibelheim townsfolk again. To gaze into them and see nothing but the flames of his own cruelty, *feel* the impression of their body against his blade… It would drive a lesser man mad.

Perhaps that's what he is. Mad. Insane. Hojo had thought the degradation couldn't affect his *masterpiece,* and yet here he is, going against everything he's ever known. Isn't that its own kind of madness? To reach desperately into the unknown, not knowing if you'll be able to take hold of anything but your own crumbling sanity?

Sighing, he turns to look at the sky. The stars had once comforted him, when he was younger. Billions of twinkling lights all screaming *'there's more, there's always more to this!'*

They always called him. Sung his name as part of a celestial choir, beckoning him forth into the endless cosmos to experience the wonder that is *life*.

Yet, somehow, that feeling isn't there anymore.

He misses it.

It was likely because of the Jenova cells within him, calling out to their ancestral home, but despite that he considers it entirely his own. There's nothing wrong with being fascinated with the endless expanse of the universe.

Perhaps that's something he can do in the future. Explore beyond the Planet, experience the breaths of stardust that brought Her to life in the first place.

Something in his soul feels soothed at the thought. The simple idea of *having* a future in mind, rather than simply going from one thing to the next with no real goal makes his life feel so much more concrete in the world.

His tombstone can mention his *goals* alongside his deeds. He can be known for more than the blood that stains his hands.

There’s something comforting about that, really.

To be remembered as more than a weapon.

Chapter End Notes

> i felt so cool for that odyssey reference. anyways, the stars are really cool to talk about

Zack - Home

Chapter Summary

Gongaga is here!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he takes that first breath of fresh, *Gongaga* air, Zack finds himself wondering how he ever managed to choke down the stuff in Midgar and Junon. Sure, it was *breathable,* but compared to the stuff he was used to he's honestly surprised he didn't get *poisoned* or something.

Naturally, his thoughts end up being inclined towards the village that's getting progressively closer. He'd been sending letters during his time at Shinra, sure, but never came to visit.

…It's been a *long* week since his last letter.

In his defense, he was a bit busier than usual with the whole *time travel* thing, then making their way to Nibelheim, then deserting the company, then…. Well, there hasn't really been a chance. He's called Aerith a few times, but she has a *PHS.* His parents, unless things changed while he was gone, are a bit too old fashioned for that.

Plus, everyone they knew was their neighbor, so. Not much of a need for long distance communication.

Vincent glances over at him from where he was fiddling with his gauntlet. "You look… uncomfortable. Are you alright?"

Blinking, he smiles. “Yeah. Just… nervous. I *did* sorta run away from home in order to join SOLDIER. Also… it’s just weird to be home after so long. Never came back in the other timeline, y’see, so…”

From his left, Seph glances at him as well. Jeez, sometimes it’s painfully obvious how related they are. “I thought you did so during that vacation the company forced you on?” The *‘after Angeal’* goes unsaid. He’s grateful for that.

“That was the plan. Was gonna go after the time at Costa Del Sol was up, but… *Junon.”*

“Ah.” Sephiroth looks away, staring at the village on the horizon. “Junon.”

Yeah. That just about sums it up. There’s nothing quite like replaying the moment in your head where, *really,* couldn’t he have just reached that little bit farther and caught Hollander? How much would’ve changed?

Whatever. Not like it’ll happen again. Things have changed, people are different… Angeal’s alive.

Hopefully they figure out where Seph’s mom is. He’s their only lead, and yet all he can muster up is *cave, crystals, water.* Which, from his knowledge, sums up just about every cave in existence. Except maybe the ones in Corel.

Though to be fair, those were mines. Coal is still a crystal, isn’t it? Or is it a mineral? Or is it neither of them? Seriously, he *really* should’ve read those books on rocks when he was younger.

The wonders of hindsight. He really finds himself regretting a lot of things.

Joining Shinra isn't one of them. While, *yeah,* he can admit that it's really not the kind of environment a freshly fourteen year old kid should've been in, if he hadn't… he would have never met Angeal or Seph.

Sure, whether he was there or not things probably wouldn't have changed. Angeal and Genesis would leave, Sephroth would go crazy in the reactor… but the fact he *was* there saved Seph from having to fight his only friends.

That's gotta be a plus side, right?

He absently notes that the pathway beneath their feet is getting smoother and clearer. They're getting close to the village then. Close to home.

Seph's gonna get to meet his parents! He's going to have to explain some things to them too, not to mention find Nana Neith (she can be hard to find, sometimes), but they're just like him in that they'll go with the flow.

Hopefully. It's been long enough since he last saw them that he's not entirely certain, anymore.

It's quiet, so he notices the voice as soon as it comes. The enhancements probably help with that. Two faint shadows off in the distance, talking. "Hey, Addy? Is that who I think it is?"

The girl (woman now, technically… the two of them should've hit eighteen by now) says something in reply, but he doesn't hear it in his surprise. Adeline and Adam, also known as *the* most trouble causing duo in all of Gongaga. Who in their right mind put *them* in charge of keeping an eye out for monsters?

Still, he runs forward and pulls them into a hug. It's been two years since he saw them, and he'd never realized how much he missed them. Everyone from the village, really.

"Well I'll be. Zack Fair, on our front doorstep! How've you been, man? Looking tall!" The shorter of the twins (though he'll never admit that to Adam's face) exclaims, ruffling his hair.

He laughs. "Been good. Who put the two of *you* in charge of the gate?"

Adelinde grins. "Who else but Grandpa Villiers? What can we say, no one is immune to our *lovely* charms! Just had to convince him it'd keep us out of trouble, and *bam!"*

Why did he even bother being surprised? It's always mischief with these two, honestly. "Must've taken some good stew. Say, are mom 'n dad in? I'll never hear the end of it if I didn't visit them the second I was near the village."

Adam nods, gesturing him through the gate. "Yep. They got back from harvestin' some stuff a little bit ago. Say, those two over there with you?" He points towards Seph and Vincent, who are looking *very* awkward in the face of the reunion. He nods.

"Yep. Friends of mine."

The woman looks over from where she was searching the two of them with her eyes. Adelinde looks like she almost says something when her eyes land on Sephiroth, but she clearly decides not to point out the obvious. So she *does* know when there are some things best left unsaid.

Shocking.

After a moment more, the three of them are let in without much more of a fuss. His friend leans in after a moment. “Is everyone else in Gongaga as… *energetic* as them?”

That’s a question. After a moment’s thought, he shakes his head. “Nah. Those two have always been up to hijinx. Most are content to just go about their days. Though to be fair,” He snickers to himself, “It’s not as though the place is ever *quiet.* Always something goin’ on.”

Seph hums, but doesn’t say anything more as Zack guides them to a lonely house across a bridge. Well, lonely in the sense that it’s not quite got the same hustle and bustle as everywhere else.

Pausing at the door, he hesitates a moment before knocking.

It’s just a minute later that his mom opens it, apron still on. Was she making dinner?

H’es just about to ask when he’s pulled into an even *tighter* hug than the twins managed (which is a bit surprising, since they had two people’s worth of strength). She buries her face in his hair, gathering him close.

It’s comforting. Somehow, that really makes it kick in that he’s *home*.

“Zackary. If you *ever* do that again, I’m going to personally leave you to the Grandhorns, do you understand?”

Yep. He’s home alright. “Yeah, ma. I’m happy to be home too. Wanna say hi to my friends? They’ve been excited to meet the woman who could wrangle me so well.”

That’s a lie (sort of), but the best way to get on his mom’s good side is to compliment her. So… it’s in their best interest!

Chapter End Notes

> this is where the original characters tag comes in. they won't appear again. anyways, for adelinde and adam i imagine just the weasley twins except one is a girl. they were the best part abt harry potter

Sephiroth - Longing

Chapter Summary

He meets the parents, and perhaps someone else, as well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sephiroth finds it incredibly obvious which parent Zackary took after more.

His father is a fairly calm man, watching them with quiet interest, but his mother…

Well, she's brilliant, for one. She's also somehow managed to get them all sitting at the table eating dinner together like she's known him and his father for their entire lives. It's similar to how you just can't help but follow Zack's whims despite knowing it's not the best idea.

It's nice, though. There aren't many moments in his life that Sephiroth can look back on quite as fondly as the one he's experiencing now.

This must be what it means to be a family. To be loved.

Soon he's going to have this too.

He can see it now. Him, his parents, Aerith, and Zack. All together, talking about something inconsequential and *laughing.* It's a simple image, yet so profound. Heartwarming, even. It's strange to find such joy in the simplest of moments.

To realize he will finally be human.

Sure, he may be so in body (as Zack has routinely insisted upon), but would that be the case in the soul? Or has he spent so much time with Jenova's influence within him that he mutated into something *else*.

Foreign to the Planet. Foreign to humanity, to the bonds of life and love that make up every living thing, foreign to the kinds of simple pleasures like a family dinner or the chance to ever-

"Sephiroth? Are you alright, hon?" Zackary's mother questions, her voice warm. It's just enough to draw him out of his thoughts. "Yes. I was simply lost in thought for a moment there. My apologies, Mrs. Fair."

"Please, call me Peonia. Everyone does." She smiles gently, and he nods despite himself. It must run in the family, that ease in which Zack manages to get you to *listen* to him.

The rest of the meal goes quickly. The boy updates his parents with the general details of what happened, with him and Vincent adding the occasional comments for clarification.

It's nice.

They're ushered off to Zack's old room before long, with the promise that Peonia will make a quick trip to the market to see if anyone's seen Nana Neith recently.

("You want to talk to her, bug? …I suppose the two of you always got on well. I'm in need of a few things anyways, so I'll ask around,

alright? Get some rest, you three.")

Though the sun's barely hit the end of the horizon, it doesn't take long for the three of them to lie down. Gongaga isn't the most travel friendly location, so despite the fact that they were accompanied by someone well acquainted with the area it's still been a hard journey, and that's without considering how they've been sleeping on the ground for the last few days.

Normally he'd have been able to go for another few days without this sort of bone-deep exhaustion.

Though… that was his normal *with* the Jenova cells.

He still doesn't know what's normal for him *now*.

It's been well over a week since they came back. It's as though ever since, so much has happened that the passage of time has become foreign to him. Sephiroth is just following along without truly giving everything a second thought.

He's just been letting everything *happen* without thinking about it, because if he stops to think it's entirely possible he'll never start moving again. There's just so much to think about- so many things that *could* happen, that *have* happened- that it's overwhelming.

Now they've almost found his mother. He's going to get to meet her *face to face*.

He's going to get to ask her things he should've always known. What's her favorite food? Her favorite color? Why did she inject him with

Jenova cells? Why did she *leave?* Did she not have the courage to face what she did to her *own son,* or did Hojo have something to do with it?

Sighing, he rests his head in his hands. If only he could have gone back farther, solved *more…*

But would that really fix things?

He's still the child of a Cetra who betrayed the Planet, forsook Her for the Calamity from the skies. He's still the child who will never hold the same connections to Her that Aerith and Zack do because they were never able to fully *develop.*

Sephiroth will never belong to humanity, nor will he ever belong to the Planet. Instead he belongs to nothing but himself, and isn't that terrifying?

To be wholeheartedly in charge of himself as a person, without anything to fall back on.

Pulling his head out of his hands, he glances around the room. The other two are asleep (though with Vincent it's hard to tell). They won't see him like this.

Good. They have enough to worry about. He's seen the constant frown on Zackary's face. The boy is already trying his best without having to support him as well. His father has to wrangle the four beings he shares a mind with.

Neither of them need to know about what's going on with him.

Quietly, so as to not disturb the others in the house (a quick glance shows that Peonia has indeed returned from the market), he heads outside. The moon bathes him in its gentle glow, and something in him relaxes at the sight of the stars.

Though he may no longer have the cells drawing him to them, the knowledge that the universe is so much *more* is strangely comforting.

Sitting down on the edge of the platform, legs dangling over the river beneath, he sighs.

He's already decided that he wants to go to space, after all of this. To see the stars, the Planet in all her glory… It'd be brilliant. But then what? Keep going through space?

The idea had intrigued him before, yet somehow… the idea doesn't have quite the same allure. What would there be for him? Would it even be possible? Space travel hasn't quite evolved enough for even *one* expedition into space.

Even if it was, why would they send *him?*

"You seem like you have a lot on your mind." A gentle voice says, tearing him out of his thoughts. A glance to the side shows a beautiful woman, dark hair flowing in rivulets behind her as her brown skin seemingly *glows* in the moonlight.

She moves to sit down, so he shifts to the side a bit. Something about her is *strange.* Off-putting in a way he can't describe.

“Sometimes it’s easier to have company when you’re thinking heavy thoughts. At least, that’s what Zack always said. Does he still do that?”

Ah. One of Zackary’s friends. Of course. “I suppose.”

When she laughs, it’s like a melody. It makes his spine shiver. “Who are you?” *What* are you?

“My name is Minerva. Though *you* may know me better as Nana Neith, young child of both the Planet and Calamity.”

Chapter End Notes

> tee hee.. i was so proud about this one. Neith is an Egyptian goddess, said to be the creator of the world in some cases. I considered it fitting with how Minerva is sorta the planet,, and also it sounded cool. fun fact! they were originally separate, and Neith was originally called 'Blair'. i decided that it really just didnt read right, so did some research on counterparts/alternate names for Minerva, which led me here! interesting time, that was.

Sephiroth - Conversations with a Goddess

Chapter Summary

Finally. Explanations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sephiroth sits there for a moment, letting the words sink in. It would explain a lot, certainly, but-

Minerva. That Goddess Genesis worships from that book. She was here this *whole time?* How much could have… clearly, she *knows-*

“Calm your mind, child. There’s an explanation for everything. You need only ask.” She days gently, the thoughts churning in his head quieting down in barely a moment. Blinking, he sighs and turns to look at her. If she’s willing to answer… surely there can be no harm?

Pursing his lips, he asks the first question. “Why haven’t you interfered in anything?” So many things could’ve been *fixed* had she only…

Angeal could’ve been…

“I did. Surely you and Zack wondered why you came back here, yes? You both spent *so long* away from the embrace of the Planet holed up inside that *city,* aside from his occasional visits to Aerith’s sanctuary… and it certainly wasn’t helped by your connection to the Calamity.”

It was her. Somehow, the thought doesn’t surprise him at all. Of *course* it was a legendary Goddess who had a hand in everything. Honestly,

they already knew that the Planet was the cause, so it should've been natural for them to assume that the embodiment of Her will was involved.

Apparently he hasn't paid enough attention to Genesis' recitations of Loveless.

As Sephiroth goes to ask his next question (what *does* one ask a God?) quiet footsteps sound behind them. A glance shows it to be his father.

Zackary is still asleep then. Perhaps they should wake him… though he's been pushing himself recently, so that might not be the best course of action. "Hello, father."

The man settles beside him, wine red eyes glancing between the two of them. "Hello. Chaos was acting… odd, so I felt it best to investigate. I see now that it was a good idea."

Hm. It must have been a concern to see his bed empty, especially in such a foreign environment. Perhaps he should've left a note? Other than that… the behavior of the WEAPON confirms that she isn't lying about her role as divine. Though he'd already figured that to be the case when she knew about the time travel, it's nice to have additional confirmation.

Now for the questions he *desperately* wishes to see answered. "Where's my mother? And… and why did she place Jenova's…" He trails off, voice weak.

Does he even *want* to know why she placed those cells in him, despite being a Cetra? Was she simply unaware or did she *know* and *do it anyway?*

It's quiet for a moment, before Lady Minerva (it does no good to be rude to the divine) sighs. "She's located in a cave between Nibelheim and Corel. As for the other half… I regret to say that it has something to do with the Planet."

She was… that close? He'd almost succumbed to the grasp of that wretched Calamity *so close* to his true mother? And- "What do you mean by that?"

The sound of Zackary's (how had the boy gotten so close without him noticing) voice jolts him out of his tunneling thoughts. They hadn't been *that* loud, and he was *sure* the boy was deep asleep. So…

A glance to the side reminds him that there's a *goddess* sitting beside him. To take a page out of the puppy's book, *'at this point it wouldn't be surprising if the Planet was hit by a meteor.'*

"Ah. I'd guided knowledge of this meeting into your dreams, but I was unsure you would interpret it correctly. It's a pleasure to see you again, little warrior." Lady Minerva smiles at Zack, and after a moment, the boy responds in kind.

Something in Sephiroth relaxes at seeing the interaction. If there was any lingering doubt (somehow), Zack's approval washes it away. He's never been wrong about who to trust *before,* after all.

"As for what I meant…" She sighs, staring at the river running beneath them. "Lucretia and Ifalna were shining hopes for their parents. The most pureblood Cetra born in *centuries.* Yet once the time came for them to learn how to access the Planet's knowledge… while Ifalna managed to do so in leaps and strides, Lucretia… couldn't."

That's… like him. He'd figured it was from the cells but… he got it from his mother?

The Goddess stares up at the sky, eyes filled with some unfathomable emotion. "She grew more bitter at each success of her sisters, which *always* followed a failure of hers. Until she left and joined that accursed company. It was then she learned of Jenova, and though all her teachings taught her otherwise all she saw in that moment was the chance to give her child the power she never had."

Power.

So in the end, it all loops back around to desperate people reaching for power.

Somehow, this doesn't really surprise him.

All his life, it's just been one power struggle after another, all from different people wanting him for different reasons. Money, fame, *power*. They always seek to take, and take, and *take* from him despite him having nothing to give (just a few weeks ago they *owned* him).

It all happened just because his *mother* gave it to him.

He doesn't quite register the feeling of tears down his cheeks until Lady Minerva gently clutches it between her hands. He's not *supposed* to- "Cry all you need, my child. You have suffered much from her choices. I will not deny you this simple freedom."

He can feel Zack and his father's arms drape over his shoulders in the closest thing to a hug they can manage in the current position.

It's comforting. So, *very,* comforting.

"Is it strange that I still want to know her? To love her?" After all that she did, betraying the Planet she was a steward of for something as simple as *power?* He wouldn't be surprised if the Goddess told him that it was unacceptable. That one such as *that* could never be known by one of Her last children.

Yet, he finds himself surprised. "No. Though he has made mistakes- *grave* mistakes, she is still your mother. Though I lack one of my own, I have learned that such feelings are natural to human beings. There is no shame to be had in that."

Nice, that's how it feels. Knowing that he is here with those who care, who *understand*- or at least try their best to.

Strange. If he'd had this conversation with Angeal and Genesis at his side, would they have reacted the same? Would Angeal embrace him the way Zack is? Would Genesis be steadfast at his side like his father?

Sephiroth had considered them to be *close,* but perhaps they were simply *friends.* Perhaps less. What he knows as friendship comes from the puppy, who stayed at his side even as he fought to *kill* him. Who stayed with him despite everything- despite barely even *knowing* him. Is *that* a better definition of friendship?

"The sun will be rising soon. Do you three still wish to find Lucretia?" Lady Minerva questions, and he nods. The other three must as well, since as he looks at her in all her radiance, she smiles.

"I'm quite proud of you all. You fought against fate, destroyed the

Calamity, all because you cared for one another. Now go, children. Face her. Perhaps there is another fate to be changed."

She waves her hand, and within barely even a moment he knows no more.

Chapter End Notes

ah yess cliffhangers. sometimes i use them. in other news... only 11 chapters left! wow. almost feels like yesterday i started writing this.

Angeal - Explosions

Chapter Summary

> When Hollander isn't getting the job done, there aren't many others you can turn to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As a result of another one of Genesis' fits of madness (that were becoming all the more common as time went on), the two of them found themselves heading back to Midgar. Perhaps they should've brought Hollander, at least to ensure he wouldn't try to *run,* but…

There are clones watching him now. If his friend still hasn't freaked out, that *must* mean everything's alright.

"Remind me. Why are we going back to Midgar?" Angeal questions as they fly over the landscape, chancing a glance at Genesis.

The man laughs.

"Have you already forgotten, Angeal? If we go there, we can find Hojo and perhaps find a *cure* for this… *thing.* Surely with his prized specimen gone, he'd be willing to take what he believes to be *second best,* hm?"

Right.

How could he have forgotten?

When they'd received the news that Sephiroth and Zack, of all people, had deserted Shinra it'd been such a shock to them both that he'd seen a clarity in Genesis' eyes that hasn't been there in years. Has the degradation truly been there for so long?

The last time his friend looked like that they'd still been living in *Banora.*

"He's never been willing to work with anyone for a long period beyond Sephiroth. How can we be sure he's going to agree?" That's not even mentioning the fact the man is *slimy.* The Silver General (though his hair isn't quite that shade anymore) always got a *look* in his eyes whenever the Professor summoned him for whatever test he wanted done.

Genesis glances at him. "Why would we bother giving him a choice?"

Because it's dishonorable, he almost says, but he manages to stop himself. They haven't had honor in a long time. He lost *his* when he left Zack to die.

He can feel the ache in his bones. Angeal can only wonder… is honor *really* that important? All that it has done is keep them quiet in the face of death. Wutai was simply fighting for its *right* to survive, and they killed so many of them.

Sometimes when he looks down at his hands he sees the bloodstains.

He told Zack to be *proud* of it.

What a monster he is.

Neither of them speak until they're landing atop the building. "I'll send clones to distract any guards. He's often on the sixty-seventh floor, yes?"

Angeal nods in response to the question, the two of them starting towards the stairs. It's best that they make sure they're impeded as little as possible- though they're still capable, their abilities have been failing them little by little.

What will take them first? Death, or them degrading to the point that there's nothing left of them?

He loathes the idea of the second one. Death would be far kinder than *that.*

It doesn't take long to get to the lab from there. The building is practically deserted thanks to their distractions on the lower floors, and if there's one thing the two of them remember from the little Sephiroth talked about Hojo is that he wouldn't leave unless he's already *dead.*

Truth be told, he'd had his doubts. But the man before him is most certainly still performing experiments.

"Ah. The two *failures,* I see. If you want something you'd best get talking now. I don't have the time for your meaningless drivel." He states harshly, typing away at a computer for a moment before moving towards a collection of beakers.

Genesis stands in his way. "Professor, surely with your *prized* subject gone you've become terribly bored, hm? And your standing… *pride*

stripped away, the end is nigh… there must be little left for you here. With your creation *gone* you're nothing more than a waste of money for them."

Professor Hojo glares at him over his glasses, moving around him. "You're much too foolish if you think I *care.* Sephiroth is my proudest creation, a true descendant of the Cetra destined for greatness. So long as he lives in this world nothing will get in my way."

That's… interesting. He'd been unaware of the exact details regarding their former friend. So he's intended to be a Steward of the Planet?

Either unaware or uncaring of the growing anger in Genesis' eyes, the man continues speaking. "Though he destroyed his mother's body in the reactor… simply a minor setback. It's a shame his cells seem to be breaking down."

What?

"Are you trying to say that *he's* degrading as well?" Genesis asks, so incredulous he's knocked out of his rage for a moment. Angeal understands the feeling well.

"What other explanation could there be? He returns from Wutai attached at the hip with that *boy,* and suddenly his hair is changing color and his behavior is altered. Really, it's a reasonable conclusion, albeit one I dislike." Hojo glances back at them both. "Though this chat is quite *interesting,"* the sarcastic tone says otherwise, "you really should tell me what you want. You're in the way."

Genesis *snarls.* "You will help *cure* us, or else I will *kill you. That* is what we *want."*

The Professor looks the two of them up and down, pausing for a moment, before smiling. It's sickening. Sephiroth had mentioned that you felt like you were under a microscope, every inch of you being observed, whenever you were in the room with him. He'd never thought too much of it. Now, perhaps he understands.

"I see. My *sincere* apologies to you both then, but I'm afraid I don't have the time to save Hollander's failures. I suppose you'll have to kill me then."

As Genesis summons a fire in his palm to do *just that,* Angeal hears a faint noise from behind them. He barely has the chance to knock them both out of the way before the bullet soars past.

A woman in a Turk suit lowers her gun, cursing.

Hojo frantically moves towards the door.

It only takes a moment for him to realize why. He'd knocked them both into the table with those beakers, whose contents are mixing together rapidly. Genesis' hand, still aflame, is right on top of them.

There's not enough time for either of them to react as the world *explodes.*

He can hear the sprinklers going off, but all they do is make it spread more. Whatever those chemicals were, the fire *isn't going out.*

Angeal manages to drag himself up, barely, though the sheer *agony* he

feels is nothing to scoff at. He needs to grab Genesis and *get out.*

Stumbling through the smoke, he damn near trips over his best friend's limp body. The fire rages behind him as he, *painfully,* hauls him over his shoulder (please be alive *please-)* and takes flight up the stairs and out through the roof.

He lands a ways away, not because he *wanted* to but because his wing *might* actually fall off if he keeps going. He doesn't need to look at it to know *that.*

A chance glance behind him (don't look at the wing don't-) shows the Shinra building up in flames.

Chapter End Notes

sometimes even rock bottom isn't far enough. for now, anyways. don't worry! there's a happy ending :)

Zack - Cave

Chapter Summary

Well, doesn't this look familiar?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Zack opens his eyes, it takes longer than he'd like to admit to realize he isn't dreaming.

In his defense, he's dreamed about being in this cave so many times that *anyone* in his situation would probably do the same thing. A glance around shows Vincent and Sephiroth laying on either side of him, still… fast asleep?

Could what Nana Neith (well, it's Minerva now, isn't it) did even *count* as just putting them to sleep? It's more like knocking them unconscious.

Still. They don't have to make their way to Sephiroth's mom on foot, which is nice. His parents are gonna *kill* him for leaving so suddenly though. Maybe they could go back sometime soon… he didn't get the chance to show the other two around Gongaga. They didn't even get to see the ruins he used to play in!

…Huh. Those were probably Cetran ruins, now that he thinks about it.

Must explain the pull he felt.

Whatever. He turns to the right and starts poking sephiroth. Maybe he'll annoy him so much he wakes up? Or get impaled. It's a fifty-fifty

chance either way honestly.

It only takes a few minutes for his friend to open his eyes, sitting up so sharply his long hair seems to linger in the air for a moment.

“Zackary. Is this-”

“Yeah. It is.” They sit there quietly for a moment. The goal of their journey since they left *Nibelheim* is so close to their grasp. They’re going to *find her*. Seph will have his mom again and then they can settle down and *relax*.

Only once Vincent stands up do they start moving.

Zack, in his expert opinion, is pretty much an expert in this place's layout, so he goes first and recalls what he can about how to navigate this maze. The sound of the waterfall certainly helps when he can’t quite remember.

In his defense, it’s hard to remember something you’ve only ever seen in dreams.

Otherwise, their trek through the cave goes practically unimpeded. The Planet must have something to do with it, since usually a cave of this size would be absolutely *overrun* with monsters.

Now that he thinks about it… despite the fact that they’ve been traveling an absurdly large distance, they haven’t really run into as many monsters as they probably should’ve. Sure, they’ve encountered *some* here and there, but usually on a trek like that it’d be over three *times* that amount.

Hm.

It's not really surprising that the Planet would interfere in things. Zack can only *wonder* how protective she must be over the last few reminders of her children.

…She's also responsible for this whole mess. Which. He doesn't really know how to feel about that. Sure, he'd figured Nana Neith might've been a really old Cetra (or a vampire), but *Minerva?*

You know, one thing they never tell you when you time travel (aside from nothing) is how exactly you're supposed to handle your old babysitter being a Goddess. Does he just… move on with his life? Will he like, get smited once she learns he called her stories weird?

Man. Although things are totally better now, he kinda misses when things were easy and he just had to stab bad guys. Who, considering they were enemies of Shinra, probably aren't actually bad.

…He's gonna save thoughts about *that* can of worms another time. Save the moral conundrums for when he isn't guiding people through a magic cave after meeting a Goddess.

Zack will *never* get over that.

It's a few minutes later where they're finally in the main room of the cave. The waterfall's absurdly loud, but somehow quiet enough that they can still hear each other. Weird, but like he said, *magic cave.*

He stands back and watches as the other two members of the party walk up to the crystal with Lucretia inside.

Sure, he could stand up there with them- he doubts they'd be upset over it- but he wants them to have this time together as a family. It's not everyday something like this happens, and he'd rather give them privacy.

Hm. While he waits, is there anything interesting to do around here?

He pulls out his PHS (not the Shinra issued one, he got rid of that a *long* time ago), checking the signal.

There goes *that* avenue. They really need to make it so that you can get a signal underground. Who will he be if he can't like, play Zolom or something? Does that even *require* a signal?

He'd check, but he doesn't have the signal to search it up. Or the game downloaded. With his hopes of playing a game or calling Aerith thoroughly dashed, he decides to wander around the room. There's not much in here other than crystals, but maybe there's some *cool* crystals. Or just… something to do.

Heading over towards the waterfall to get a good look at the interesting green ones near its base, he's surprised at the sight of the area behind it. A small lagoon surrounded on all sides by high walls, with only a few small paths leading up to the falls.

That part doesn't really shock him, but what does is the beautiful flowers coating it from every direction. The same ones from Aerith's church.

Beautiful.

Zack takes a picture on his PHS so that he can send it to her later. She might like to see this in person, even, so he hopes it doesn't go away once Lucretia's out of the crystal. A place like this deserves to be appreciated.

It reminds him a bit of his little hidey-hole in the jungle. This small area with flowers and training equipment (that he made himself, over months of very hard work) that he used to prepare for becoming a SOLDIER.

Ha.

He wonders how his younger self would handle learning that he deserted. Maybe even about the fact that, before all of this, he'd become a First Class, up there with *Sephiroth.* (Hell, he was even *friends* with the guy.)

Happy that he'd achieved his dream? Sad about him having to abandon it? Or angry that things were so bad that the Planet herself had to drag them two years back in time just so that they could fix things, and all he did was make something *else* worse instead?

If he'd have done things differently, back at Nibelheim… Genesis and Angeal could've been here with them. Vincent probably has *some* idea of how things worked in regards to the Jenova Project. Lucretia could've helped them.

Now all that he can do is just think about what could've been.

Chapter End Notes

zack u were doing so good.... :(

Sephiroth - Battle

Chapter Summary

> Shinra hasn't been very active recently. That doesn't mean forever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sephiroth absently notes that Zack has left the room, but he doesn't bother to go and see what happened. It was likely the boy wanted to give them privacy, after all.

His eyes don't leave the figure of his mother, encased in mako crystal.

She's beautiful. If he looks close, he can see that the slope of her jaw is the same as his. The shape of her eyebrows, the fullness of her cheeks… all of them are things he's seen in the mirror countless times before.

He can even make out the brown hair that's part of his own (though that part he's seen much less- not many mirrors in the wilderness, after all). Without fully realizing it, he starts running his fingers through his hair, checking for any knots. She needs a good impression of her son- a good *first* impression, because she never even got to hold him.

It wouldn't be surprising if she hadn't had the chance to see him before *Hojo* took him away.

Gently, he rests the palm of his hand on the outside of the crystal. It's smooth, and somehow *warm,* despite the chill surrounding them at all angles.

“Why have you come here?” A voice rings out through the room. It gives off the impression of something that used to be pride, but has long since become anything *but.*

“Mother? Is that you?” He asks, hope filling his tone. If she can speak then that means she’s alive which means he can get her out and *finally* feel a mothers love. Even if she loathes him… it will be worth it. He can feel his fathers hand- the human one- rest on his shoulder.

A ghostly form appears in front of them both, resembling the sleeping (please don’t be dead *please-)* form of Lucretia. Her gaze switches between them with nothing but sadness in her eyes. *“Vincent? And… is that you, Sephiroth?”*

“Yes, mother.” Sephiroth says quietly. He’d never imagined that he’d ever be able to see her, much less hear her voice. It’s…

He doesn’t know how to feel about it.

Lucretia’s face scrunches up as though she’s about to cry. *“Why have you come here? Why? Have you destroyed the world as those visions showed? Have you come to slay me in the name of that Calamity?”*

What?

“He has not. Sephiroth slayed that *thing* with his own hands, Lucretia. Jenova is long gone.” His father says. He finds himself grateful… How exactly does someone respond to an accusation like *that?*

When she turns to look at him, he can see tears start to pour down her face. She locks eyes with his father and, somehow, manages to look even more despairing than she had prior. *“Vincent… you must loathe me for what I’ve done. I turned you into a monster, used you… and all you did was warn me. I was never even strong enough to tell you about your son.”*

Sephiroth frowns. “My father is not a monster, and neither does he hate you, mother. You made mistakes, yes, but no one blames you for it.” At that, she shakes her head and turns to look at him.

After a moment, she walks over and cups his face in her hands, tilting it this way and that, seemingly trying to catch a glimpse of it at every angle. *“You’re just as beautiful as I imagined you’d be, Sephiroth. Do… Do you have any friends?”* A sudden change in subject, but it’s obviously intentional.

Just a few months ago, he’d have firmly said *no.* Angeal and Genesis had betrayed him, and Zackary… the boy had been more of an acquaintance, in his eyes. It wasn’t until that fateful day in the reactor that he’d considered them to be anything more. But now, after everything, he feels confident in his response. “I do. He’s here right now, although…”

A glance around the cave reminds him that Zack had wandered off at some point. “Well, he’ll come around at some point, I suppose.”

She laughs a bit. He’s not one for poetic language, but it’s akin to the twinkling of bells.

It’s the first time he’s ever heard his mothers laugh.

“…I hope I get to meet him. If… If I may ask, how did you find me? I tried

so hard to-" She cuts herself off at the last second, looking down in shame. It doesn't belong there. "Lady Minerva brought us here. From what Chaos is saying… she was worried about you." Vincent says, quietly.

This must be hard for him. Sephiroth, at least, has the privilege of there being no history between them beyond relation. His father, however, has to face the woman who made him into something not entirely human. Yet somehow, he's managed to stay strong despite it all.

Lucretia looks at them both, eyes widened in shock. *"But- I don't- why? I have done nothing but forsake her!"*

"It's because she loves you, mother. You're one of her children." He says. Really, it sounds so simple. It's just because of love. She did this to him because she loved him. That doesn't mean he doesn't want to talk about it later, but she had the best of intentions.

As she goes to respond, Zack comes barrelling in. "Sorry to interrupt the reunion, but you should get her out of that crystal *pronto.* I saw a Shinra airship heading this way."

It's a bit of a blur from there.

Lucretia doesn't have much of a reason (or a chance) to resist her body being freed from its confinement, with the apparition of her fading the moment it takes in that first, desperate gasp of air.

They'd considered fleeing deeper in, but there's no use doing so when all that they're going to find is dead end after dead end. This cave was only ever meant to be entered from one direction.

Since they've found themselves blocked in, despite the fact he no longer sticks out like a sore thumb there's no point trying to find a place to flee into the wilderness. Especially since Shinra technology would notice them in a heartbeat.

"Our best hope would be to get them as they come down. Zack, you take Lucretia. The two of us are better at range, and you'd be the best at protecting her." As his father says it, the boy nods and runs deeper into the cave with her in his arms. Hopefully nobody tries to *make* another route inside.

It's a terribly common tactic of Shinra's.

When he and Vincent step out into the light, it takes him a minute to see the ship. Without the Jenova cells, his eyes are slower to adjust, more human. He'd been happy about it up to this point.

Now? All it serves as is just another tally against them.

He stands out less, at least. If he had to choose between *power* and *humanity*… well, he supposes his answer would be obvious, wouldn't it?

All he's ever wanted was to be like everyone else, and now he is, yet it may end up killing them. Will they die happy?

Perhaps.

But they will not die free.

He readies Masamune as the ship lands, preparing for SOLDIERS, or robots, or infantry. Yet the person who comes down is none of those three.

Instead, it’s something much worse.

Chapter End Notes

> 'will they die happy? perhaps. but they will not die free.' oh my god shakespeare is QUAKING in his boots..... sorry bro i cooked here i can't even lie

Sephiroth - Weapon

Chapter Summary

> He was made to fight. To be a weapon. And so he will be just what he was made to be.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's all a blur from there.

He's swinging at these strange *monsters* (some of them look *human-)* for who knows how long, launching spell after spell at the damned things that *just won't die.*

His father had long since handed control over to the Galian Beast. The man is skilled with a gun, but when you're in combat as close quarters as this…

Masamune sings as another one falls before his blade, though it stands back up not long after. He's hit them with practically every spell in his arsenal, and yet somehow they refuse to stay down. The only other thing with as much resistance as this was… *Jenova.*

But that *thing* is dead.

Except…

If Hojo had enough of those cells to attempt to inject him with them despite it being in Nibelheim… Who's to say that he didn't have enough to make monsters? These things are *exactly* the bastard's style, after all.

“Father!” He calls out, hoping that the man can hear him through *whatever* Galien is. “Hojo’s behind this!”

Sephiroth can’t hear any sort of confirmation that he was heard, but he can only hope for the best at this point. If these monsters are here, that must mean that the Professor *himself* is too, certainly. He doesn’t like to leave his toys unattended until they’ve proved themselves worth the effort of creation.

He’d know that for a fact.

All they need to do is give him enough reason to come down so he can *kill the man.* As Zackary might’ve put it had he been here, he should *‘really, just stab the guy and get it over with.’*

So he’s going to do just that. He weaves through the monsters (no point in trying to kill something that *can’t die),* beelining towards the opening of the ship and making his way inside. It’s a lot easier than he figured it would be, but it was likely never meant to be an *interrupted* trip.

As he makes his way down the halls, he finds himself thinking. The only reason anyone would have for coming to this cave would be if they *knew* what was inside.

That would mean Hojo knew his mother was here the whole time.

With that thought firmly planted in his head, his trek through the ship became more of a warpath. Nothing was spared his wrath, no matter how small.

The source of his fears, the main protagonist in his nightmares, knew where his mother was *this whole time.* He knew, and yet lied to him anyway to get him to fall into the Calamity's grasp. His childhood, all of the things he believed for so long, never needed to happen had the man just gone to bring her back.

There's a universe where he got to know his mother in childhood.

But it isn't this one, and for that he will offer no mercy.

He slams through the last door with not even a hint of kindness in his eyes. Whoever's in there- whether it be Hojo or not- will be spared not even an *inch* of his wrath. For coming to take away his family right as they've been reunited.

They wanted a weapon.

So they got one.

Hojo, covered in bandages, stares back at him. Then the man laughs. And laughs.

And *laughs.*

"So you've returned, my boy, just as I thought you would! Despite the… alterations the degradation made to your appearance it's clear your mind is still intact. You're no fool- you would never survive outside of Shinra. I made sure of that!"

He hardly pays any attention to the statement- most of its incorrect assumptions based on observation- and continues his trek forward. Masamune hums in the palm of his hand.

Were he to spare a thought for it, he'd note that it's almost in sync with his heartbeat.

So, he's decided that his greatest achievement is suffering from degradation? It's a reasonable assumption, certainly. No one would expect *time travel.*

Sephiroth laughs. What Hojo *doesn't* know is that his theory is wrong. *The man is wrong.* His greatest pride is his knowledge, and he doesn't know enough so he's *wrong!* He loathes being wrong so intensely that he's rewritten genetic code to *be* right, and yet he's wrong!

When he finally stops to breathe, he stares at Hojo with a smile on his face. It's the first time he's ever seen the *great Professor* look scared, and it's because of the very same child who he tormented day in and day out!

Perhaps he's finally gone mad. Is this what Genesis feels like, in the throes of his madness? He can't help but smile at the *'poetic justice'* as he'd have put it. For the tormented to become the tormentor.

He can hear Masamune's choir echo in his ears. A song of divine judgment.

"S-Sephiroth? What are you-"

Hojo doesn't get to finish.

As he stands there for a moment, gore coating his blade, his smile widens.

He's free.

He's *finally* free. Hojo is gone. Shinra can't control him anymore. Him and his family (he can't quite recall when he started including Zack) can live their lives once they get Aerith out of Midgar.

During the walk back out to the battlefield, he can't help but think he's dreaming. The idea of being truly *free* from Shinra was one he'd never bothered entertaining past the age of five.

Weapons don't get to dream.

But he isn't a weapon anymore, is he?

There's no one he will let wield him.

A weapon with no master isn't a weapon at all, right? Or could he be his own master, the one who controls where his blade lands or if it even strikes at all?

He has the chance to choose now. It's almost terrifying.

When he gets back out, he's met by a field of corpses and his father,

covered in blood, running up to hug him. It's warm. It's comforting.

It's like coming home.

"Father. He's… dead. I killed him. He's gone." His voice sounds hollow even to himself. He's *overjoyed* at the idea of Hojo being gone, but he can't… "What do I do now?"

"Whatever you want to do, Sephiroth." Vincent responds.

But that's the problem. He's had *ideas,* yet… Now that he has so many options available he finds that he doesn't really *know*.

There's too much for him to ever do.

Chapter End Notes

ding dong the witch is dead! i didn't forget to kill him. for long, anyways.

Zack - To Realize

Chapter Summary

> What better time for some realization than when you're hiding from certain doom?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Zack sat next to the prone form of Lucretia, eyes on the only entrance into the cavern. It's unlikely the ship will manage to make it this far (especially when faced with Vincent and Seph), but he can't help but worry.

Even the strongest people can be defeated, and he's *seen* that happen first hand. It's terrifying to watch the people you held on an untouchable pedestal die. To be the *reason* they die. He still has Angeals blood on his hands, even despite the fact that he's yet to die in this timeline.

In what world could he not worry? Bugenhagen had told him that the planet might *need* him to do something that only he can, but…

What could that be?

This entire journey he's just been following Sephiroth, being there for him. If anything, all he's done is make things worse by driving away Genesis and Angeal.

"I think that's your answer." A quiet voice says from beside him. A glance shows that it's Seph's mom, apparently having woken up sometime while he was thinking.

“What do you mean?”

“Forgive me for listening in, but you were thinking out loud. Being there for my son may very well be exactly what the planet needed you for.” She smiles at him, and it reminds him so much of Aerith it hurts. Definitely a family resemblance going on there.

What she said though… “You don’t know the full story though. We…” He pauses for a moment, but there’s really no point in hiding it from her, is there? Besides, he’s sure Seph wouldn’t mind. “We came from the future. We were in the Nibelheim reactor, fighting because of that *damn* Jenova, when all of a sudden he started fighting it.”

As he talks about it- the moment where everything changed (he hadn’t even mentioned it to *Vincent),* it starts becoming a bit clearer. He was focused on the fact he was fighting someone he held so dear *again,* please don’t let this be another Angeal-

Shaking his head to clear away *that* thought, Zack sighs. “He kept insisting that I wouldn’t *hurt him.* That I could be trusted. I still don’t- we were *friends,* sure, but… I wouldn’t say I was there for him as much as a good friend should’ve been.”

Lucretia smiles at him. “Yet you were anyways. I don’t know enough to say much, but… He sounded fond of you. Sometimes that’s all that matters.”

“I guess.” It makes sense, and hey, it’s not as though he *doesn’t* like the idea that being there for his friend was the grand mission he was given. Plus, with everything that’s happened… it doesn’t feel *wrong.*

Sephiroth has been a lot more open to him than he used to be. That has to count for something, right?

She laughs a bit. “I’m glad my son has such a good friend with him. Knowing that he wasn’t alone is… nice. I’d always worried about that. You mentioned he started fighting Jenova? Is there anything specific about what happened before that?”

Zack tilts his head. It’s a bit fuzzy- he was *pretty* focused on staying alive, after all, but the memory is still burned into his mind. He doesn't think he could ever forget it. “He’d been about to strike me with Masamune when he suddenly started just- *talking* to himself. Saying the things mentioned. After that he just… resisted its control, I guess. I don’t really know how to put it.”

Lucretia hums. He can’t tell what she thinks about it- she’s just like her son in that sense. “It seems to me that he couldn’t bring himself to hurt you. The feeling was so strong that he managed to resist the very *cells* of his body telling him to do just that.” Her smile grows wider, if that’s even possible. “He really cares about you.”

He smiles back.

Although he’d already known that Seph cared about him… the confirmation is nice.

It’s easy to worry yourself into a pit sometimes. He’s done that a fair amount, especially after that disaster in Nibelheim.

A fair few sleepless nights have been spent thinking about whether he could’ve done anything differently- maybe avoided talking so that Sephiroth could reason with them? Or have been *kinder?*

He *knows* that he’s worrying himself into a put, but there comes a

point where you just can't hold back those sorts of thoughts anymore. Practically all of his distractions can't distract him anymore, so all that he's left to do is simply *think*.

"Hey, are you alright?" Zack can hear Lucretia ask, and the only thing he can do is shake his head. He may have been eighteen before they came back, but he's sixteen *now* and he can feel every bit of it. He'd gotten *over* this already.

Yet now it just haunts him.

"...What would you do if you came back from the future to fix something and then only ended up making things worse?"

When she looks at him, he's suddenly reminded that for all her kindness this woman is still a *scientist.* Not just that- she's the one that made Vincent who he is, the reason Sephiroth was able to be controlled by Jenova. There's a sort of strength in her eyes.

"I'd say that I tried my best. Life isn't a story, you know. It's not as though everything can go perfect one-hundred percent of the time." She glances down for a moment. "It took me a long time in the crystal to realize that there are some things you just *can't* atone for. You just have to live with them."

Oh.

That's… not quite what he was expecting.

She continues despite his silence. "You seem like the type of person who puts a lot of value into the feelings of others, so I'll say this just

once. It's not your job to be there for everyone. You can't *always* be the hero."

It's quiet for a long moment.

Zack's always wanted to be a hero. For as long as he can remember, he's helped everyone he can, *been there* for everyone he can, just to be like the heroes he always read about. He'd joined Shinra for the sake of fully realizing that dream, and yet… All he did was be the villain.

Was Wutai *wrong* for opposing Shinra? For denying the building of a reactor (he'd *known* how bad those things are, the stories woven into his ear from the moment he was born) atop their ancestral ground?

No.

Yet he killed them anyway. *He's* the reason Wutai lost. *He's* the reason that, in the future he remembers, the place slowly morphed more and more into a tourist trap.

There isn't just blood on his hands. "...Then what *am* I supposed to be?"

He'd never call himself a monster- the Planet only *knows* how much he loathes that word. But… If he's not a monster then what else can he be?

Lucretia gently places her hand on his shoulder. "Think. I've studied a lot of people in my time as a scientist, and I can say for *certain* that you already know."

He thinks. For a long, *hard* moment, he digs through his memories to try and find what she means. And then he does. The answer's *painfully* obvious, really, so he's *just* a bit disappointed he didn't figure it out.

He's supposed to be himself.

Chapter End Notes

> omg zack actually has time to think! ignore the battle going on overhead. its fine. nothing to see there. this happens at the same time as the other chapter btw

Sephiroth - Back to the Start

Chapter Summary

Somehow, it always ends up looping back to Nibelheim.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They sit there like that for a bit, with him enveloped in his fathers arms, but Sephiroth eventually decides that they should go find the other two.

It's best they get out of here as fast as possible, after all.

Not much time has passed by the time they manage to figure out which part of the winding caverns the two hid in, and overall it hadn't taken them much time to finish that battle. Which makes it all the more surprising when they find the two chatting like old friends, despite having met *seemingly* just about a half hour prior.

He smiles, though. Something about Zackary looks… *better* than it has in a long while. The boy's been looking more subdued as time went on, especially after that encounter in Nibelheim, so seeing him now lifts a weight off his shoulders.

Sephiroth had been worried about him.

"Oh! Hi Seph! How'd things go? The two of us were fine in here. With how much they like their bombs I was honestly surprised I didn't hear an explosion or two go off." The aforementioned boy says, waving at them both.

Huffing a laugh, he holds out a hand to pull him up. "Things went

well. Hojo is dead." One of the things they'd agreed should happen way back when they first came back here.

It's already been so long.

Zack cheers, pulling him down into a hug. His mother watches the two of them with a fond smile on her face, and something warm blooms in his chest. He's surrounded by people he cares about and there's nothing left to hold him back.

Except… They still need to do one last thing before they can put Shinra behind them. "We need to get Aerith out of Midgar."

The boy is nodding before he even finishes the sentence, but the other two look at him in varying degrees of confusion. Right. They wouldn't know about her, would they?

"She is my cousin. Your… sister's daughter, mother."

Lucretia looks at him with sad eyes, seemingly having realized what it would mean to have the girl in Shinra's stronghold. Not only that, "…I have a niece?"

Ah.

Right. She wouldn't know, would she? "Yes."

It's quiet for a long moment, before Zackary stands up. "No time like the present. Oh yeah, I told her about the time travel, Seph. Figured

she might as well know." He tilts his head towards him, almost as if asking if it was alright, so he nods.

"That was a good idea." Keeping the four of them in the loop of anything as important as that is a key part in making sure they're able to do what they must.

He halfheartedly finds himself hoping that Minerva appears again to bring them all to Midgar- it's a long distance and, really, any moment spent *getting* there is another moment where something bad could happen to her. Zack's mentioned that the Turks are *fond* of her, but there's a fine line between that and *their jobs.*

A Turk always prioritizes their job.

But he knows well enough that she's already done them a favor by bringing them here- and there's even an airstrip down in Rocket Town, if he remembers correctly.

Their choices are limited, but they still *have* them. That's more than a lot of people can say. When he relays this information to the others, they agree it'd be their best bet to try Rocket Town. It's far away, but compared to their few other options being exclusively Shinra-sanctioned, it's their best one.

Though… they will have to pass through Nibelheim on their way there. The mountain range is too precarious to pass through already, so doing so without supplies is tantamount to suicide.

The puppy is much less agreeable to *that* suggestion.

“What do you *mean* we have to go back to *Nibelheim?”*

Sephiroth can understand the feeling, really (he’d rather never lay eyes on that *damned* place ever again), but it’s not as though they have any other choice. If they want to get to Aerith as soon as possible, taking a shortcut through the Nibel Mountains is much more preferable than trying to go around them or, Planet forbid, *over* them.

As he said before, doing so without taking a path well traveled is *suicide.*

“You already know why, Zackary. I’d rather never lay eyes on the place either, but it’s our best bet. Rest assured that we *absolutely* won’t be spending more than an afternoon there.” The promise is nothing he can guarantee, but anything’s worth keeping morale together.

He fiddles with his bangs as the boy cycles through a few emotions, before eventually sighing. With that, Sephiroth *knows* he’s won.

A glance at his parents (he has *both* of them now, and the thought makes him sway a bit) shows that they’re watching the exchange as though it’s a particularly interesting episode of those soap operas Genesis used to love so much.

“Do either of you have any suggestions?”

Vincent shakes his head. “Your idea is the most logically sound. With Jenova destroyed, there’s nothing in particular that should cause us any problems, besides the local wildlife. The dragons should be especially territorial around this time of year.”

In much the same way, Lucretia gives her agreement. The only real

reason for them to avoid the town would be their memories of the place, but they're not as important as saving Aerith.

She does suggest that the two of them can wait on the edge of town while her and his father resupply.

It's nice.

He doesn't think that the two of them would've thought of such a simple suggestion on their own. Despite his own prowess at battle plans (and Zackary's at taking into account emotions), the two of them can be… a bit oblivious at times.

It's obvious that the boy's thoughts are along a similar line, because when they look at each other his face is red with embarrassment.

They stand there for a moment in silence, before his mother starts moving to the exit. "We should get going. Time's of the essence, you three."

Though she says that, there's a fair few minutes spent with her staring at the surroundings with awe. He can't blame her- the lilies are gorgeous after all, though he does think those hues are just shy of *possible.* Still, they get walking.

His father sticks close to her incase she collapses. Having spent the last twenty-five years in a crystal, it's a miracle she can even walk at the moment, much less as far a distance as they already have. It was obviously a *stasis* of some kind, but he can't quite-

"You got your thinking face from me, Sephiroth." The woman in

question chimes in with a smile. He gives one in turn, though it does feel a bit… awkward.

Perhaps he did.

That’s a nice thought.

Chapter End Notes

> wow!! its almost over. this fanfiction was a wild ride im ngl. only 5 chapters left

Zack- Wind

Chapter Summary

To Nibelheim! Then, to Rocket Town!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The trip back to Nibelheim (the second he has a choice in the manner he's outright banning any mention of this town) doesn't take as long as Zack thought it would.

Really, in comparison to the trip to Gongaga, the fact it only takes them a day is… surprising. Though, to be fair, they were farther away. And stopped more.

All of them wanted to be rid of that town as fast as they could.

So, when they got there (he absently wonders if Cloud was already on his way to Midgar, and then banishes the thought as quickly as it came- no point to dwell on things like that), it's with ease that him and Sephiroth hide at the edge of town, near the mansion.

Being near *that place* doesn't really help much in the department of, well, *wanting* to be there, but it's the side of town closest to their goal .

They pick a random tree to hang out in while the other two get whatever they need. It'd be preferable to stay on the ground, but- there's a lot of activity in the place today. Some of it is *definitely* undercover Shinra operatives investigating the reactor (Zack's many things, but oblivious *isn't* one of them).

Still. Despite the fact that Seph isn't *that* recognizable without the trademark silver hair, it's better to be safe than sorry. Especially since the townsfolk could already identify him.

A glance to the side shows his friend is likely thinking along the same lines, though he looks a bit more uncomfortable about being in the tree. Is it just the height? Or the fact these branches probably aren't going to hold up much longer?

Either way, it doesn't take long for the other two to return with a bag slung around Vincent's shoulders.

Though nothing of much note happened, all of them seem to breathe easier as the town fades into the distance, until Sephiroth's mom stops suddenly.

Lucretia flips through the newspaper in her hands like it holds the secrets of the universe. "What the *hell?"*

When the three of them look at her in confusion (really, what could have made her act like that), she turns it around to face all of them. The headline, in big, bold letters, reads; *'Breaking News: Shinra Tower Burned to the Ground in Freak Accident!'*

Oh.

Yeah, he totally gets why she reacted like that. "Isn't it… made of metal?" Last he checked, that stuff isn't flammable. Unless the fire was hot enough to melt it?

Sephiroth nods his head. "Most of the outer shell is. However, the

supports and interior are composed of wood and drywall in order to reduce costs. Sturdy enough metal can get remarkably expensive after a certain amount."

Ah. That makes sense. Vincent tilts his head in curiosity. "How did you manage to learn that? The President always insisted that only the Turks needed to know about the building's structural components."

"Veld told me." Zack half expects that the Veld guy told Seph *everything* at this point. He kinda gets the deal though… he was meant to protect Shinra (or well, its interests on the battlefield), so anything that might help him do that would be important knowledge.

They start walking again after that, though the father and son spend their time quietly talking in the front, leaving him trailing behind with Lucretia.

It's not that she's bad company though. Pretty funny, all things considered, though her jokes are a bit outdated. By a good few decades. They're still good ones though!

He also has to explain a PHS, when he goes to tell Aerith that they're coming to get her.

Sometimes it's really easy to forget that half of the people they're traveling with haven't interacted with the world in twenty-five years. If they hadn't come back to get them out… would they have stayed like that for the rest of their lives? Could they even *die* when they were like that?

Huh.

That's a series of thoughts he doesn't really want to pursue.

"Say, what *exactly* is the plan for rescuing Aerith? She's guarded by a few Turks at pretty much all times, so we can't just grab her and then get out. Not to mention she's probably gonna want to bring Ms. Gainsborough with her." It's a reasonable question that they probably should've addressed sometime *before* right-about-now.

Vincent hums, tilting his head for a moment. "Chaos says she should know when we get near. As long as she acts beforehand, it shouldn't be too difficult." He sounds doubtful that's going to happen.

Considering the course of their luck so far… yeah, he kinda doubts things'll go smoothly too.

So. "What do we do if that's *not* the case?"

"Fight them. If they're even half as well trained as the ones I knew, then those Turks will flee before they suffer anything life threatening. The company prefers assets as valuable as them to stay alive, even if it could cost important information." The man (though he's still confident he's a vampire) says with a shrug.

Why does he even bother being surprised at this point? The Turks are pretty important to the company, so it's only *obvious* they'd be given that kind of ability. Still… he'd always figured that the SOLDIERS were important *too,* but they were generally told to *solve the problem* or *die trying.*

Zack isn't sure how to feel about that.

Knowing that the company he'd allowed to *experiment* on him didn't even view him (or anyone else, for that matter) as worthwhile enough to keep alive?

Now that he thinks about it, the people who trained them always seemed hellbent on the idea that *fleeing* wasn't honorable. That preserving your life over whatever mission you were sent on wasn't a good thing. That it was better to lose the money spent on them than have them come back with a *failure* under their record.

It's strange to wonder how he'd never noticed it sooner.

Shaking his head, he forces himself to think about something else. It's not as though he was blissfully ignorant to the types of cruelties Shinra is capable of, so it doesn't need to bother him as much as it does.

He focuses his thoughts on happier things, like the fact that Rocket Town is just over the horizon.

It doesn't take long from there to reach the place. The four of them had pretty much started *booking* it the second they realized the town was there (considering how long they'd been going, it's not much of a surprise), and even less time was spent searching for the person they needed.

It's late enough in the day that if this guy isn't a night-owl they might be in a *bit* of trouble, but when they knock on the door they'd been directed to the man in question opens it with a smile.

At least, Zack hopes it's a smile.

“Jeremy, ah *said*- Oh. Y’all are new here. What d’ya want? It’s late, so save it for tomorrow if it’s not important.”

Sephiroth chimes in at that, and the man's cigarette damn near *falls out* of his mouth at the sight of the legendary Silver General (though he isn’t really silver anymore). “It’s quite urgent, Captain Highwind. We need to be taken to Midgar as soon as possible. We can pay whatever you ask.”

Chapter End Notes

yeah i didn't wanna deal with nibelheim. got it all over with. anyways.... familiar accent, isn't it? also a pain in the ass to write.

Sephiroth - Church

Chapter Summary

Reunions! Not the bad kind.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sephiroth doesn't like taking advantage of his position (or what *used* to be his position). It feels… disingenuous, in a way. As though people only value him because of his *power*.

Captain Highwind, once he gets over his gawking at having a war-hero on his doorstep, is different. He invites them in to have some tea while he gets his plane up and running, which… was a bit of a surprise.

He doesn't think he's ever been invited into someone's home for something so simple. Or ever been invited at all.

The closest he'd ever gotten to that sort of thing would be when he went to Angeal or Genesis's apartments. Even then, he'd never stepped foot *inside*. Just grabbed them for training.

Zackary had *wanted* to, but apparently there was nothing particularly interesting about the flat he shared with that other Second-Class… Kunsel, was it? Either way, it's a foreign experience to him. Alongside the… unique personality that Highwind has.

Sephiroth isn't quite sure he's ever met anyone with as much… *intensity* as the man he's watching fiddle away at a plane engine. He knew there was a passion for the craft- he'd heard whispers about having him head a space program before that fateful trip to

Nibelheim, after all- but seeing it in action is something else entirely.

It takes his breath away. He'd never quite understood what it meant to be *passionate* about something, though that was mostly because he'd never been given the chance. Seeing someone with such visible love for their craft makes him wonder if he could ever be like that too.

Could he ever feel as much love for something as it's clear Highwind does that plane? He tries to imagine himself doing something he loves, though the thought comes out blank.

He'd almost forgotten that he lacks things one could feel passionate about. Caring for Masamune is an exception- she's more like… a pet, if anything. There was little else that he truly owned. His musings are interrupted as Zack smiles at him, gesturing at his cup. "You've been finished with that for a while. Everything alright?"

Oh.

"Yes, I'm fine. Just lost in thought."

They sit there in silence for a moment, no one really knowing what to say. It's not as though there was much talking going on before, but now that they've started it just feels… wrong? Sephiroth doesn't quite understand it.

It's at that moment where Captain Highwind returns, with what looks to be a fresh cigarette. "Everything's all set up. No one missing anything? Great. Get in."

They get in the plane. If anyone had originally had anything they

wanted to ask, the look the man gives them swiftly silences it. He feels a bit bad- it's late, and they're getting him to take them across the *ocean* (a trip which will surely take most of the night). At least they're paying him.

His mother hangs her face over the side, looking a bit green. It reminds him of that little trooper back in- no. She hasn't been out at all in the past twenty-five years, so of course she's feeling a bit ill.

It can be taken care of once they're in Midgar, if things persist.

…

It's not long until they're landing in a discrete part of the slums. Close enough to Sector Five that the walk won't even take that long at all, which is… preferable.

Being so close to Shinra again, after getting a taste of the freedom he's never known… disturbs him. But if it's for the sake of his cousin and her family, he thinks he can manage *this much.* It's not as though the plates are going to collapse.

…He glances upwards for a moment, just to be sure. Zackary's offhand comments have come true often enough that it's worth it to be paranoid about these things.

Captain Highwind takes his leave after wishing them well. Sephiroth can't blame him- judging by the way they're acting, it's fairly obvious something illegal is about to happen. If he'd been in the same situation, he may not have even *risked* taking them.

That house looked lived in, after all. It wouldn't be unlikely he had a family.

Once the man's gone, they head to the church. Zackary had said he informed Aerith, which means she should be in there with her mother and anything she wants to keep. He can't help but feel bad for her- leaving the only home you've ever known isn't easy- but it's for her own good.

If she stayed here any longer Shinra might take action, after all. And in that situation they may decide she's better off *dead.*

He's drawn out of his musings as they walk into the church. A sharp intake of breath, almost in surprise, is all that he can hear as he lays eyes on the two men sitting in the flowerbed.

Genesis and Angeal.

There are hands on his arms, placating, but he can't hear whatever their owners are saying over the ringing in his ears. *They're* here. The ones who abandoned them, who *cursed* them. *The ones who hurt Zack.*

Are they here to hurt Aerith too? Can he not let the memory of his friends fade with a rose tint? Must he be forced to face their forsaken forms time and time again, knowing that what he looks at is the body and not the soul, *never* the soul-

"Seph. *Calm down."* He can hear, faintly, over the sound of his own blood boiling in his veins. He doesn't look away from them- looking away from a threat is the easiest way to die, after all.

“Why should I? After all that they’ve done- after how much they’ve *hurt you,* you want me to *calm down?”* His voice is quiet, but he can tell by the way the puppy shudders in the corner of his eye that there’s an undercurrent of harshness in it.

He takes a deep breath. He doesn’t want Zack to be scared of him. He can’t- he *doesn’t* want to give him a reason to leave too. Not after his family is finally all together again. Those two must be here for a reason, right? If he just asks- surely, his cousin will tell?

Aerith walks towards him from where she’d been kneeling in front of the flowers. “It’s alright, Sephiroth. She got rid of the cells. It was hard, because they’re not Cetra, but She did it for you. She said that they’re themselves again.”

When she smiles up at him, he feels himself relax, just a bit. Of course. Lady Minerva *would* want to help them, wouldn’t she? If the Goddess of the planet was the one who did it, he should at least try to be understanding.

Though he won’t let his guard down. He’s not hopeful enough for *that.* It’s just that… a small part of him (larger than he may like to admit) longs to be with his friends again. His first friends, that companionship forged on the Wutaian battlefield.

It’s not selfish of him to want that again, is it?

She moves aside after a moment. “I’m gonna talk to my aunt and uncle, alright? You go have a chat with your friends, big guy! Come here, Zack. You need a proper introduction to my mom…” Her voice fades as he follows her directions, slowly walking towards his friends.

Are they still his friends?

She *called* them that, but… it's been such a long time since they last talked peacefully. He remembers a timeline where he thought they were both dead. Where they were the reason he succumbed to that siren song and went *mad.* They were the faces behind so much suffering. The ones who lived in his nightmares. The ones who still *do.*

Can friendship really last after all of that?

Chapter End Notes

id put in that like picture of the weird little goober smiling innocently with big sparkly eyes but i havent figured that out yet so you guys just get :)

Angeal - Atone

Chapter Summary

Can a monster ever be anything but?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Angeal watches Sephiroth for a moment. Genesis doesn't even bother doing that, his head bowed down in shame. "...We have a lot to apologize for, don't we?"

Humming, the man nods, settling down at the edge of the flowerbed. "Indeed."

They sit there like that for a moment, in silence.

"...What's the point in apologizing? It's not like you'll forgive us anyways. We did terrible things to you both." Genesis says, for once absent of all the bravado he so carefully cultivated. All the grandeur he held on a pedestal, all his pride, gone.

Angeal considers it a bit unnerving to watch. His friend has been like that for as long as he's been alive, so to see it now…? "I never said that." Seeing and hearing the man that Sephiroth has become after leaving Shinra is *another* kind of unnerving. There's a peace about him that was never visible when he was the *General.*

Is this who they could've always known? Always been friends with? A man who looks comfortable in his own skin, who looks healthier and happier?

A man who would've never existed if they stayed?

"You still have every right to never forgive us. We… We hurt *so many people,* but you and Zack most of all." He still thinks back on that moment. In his madness he'd come to terms with it, but now? Every waking moment lays it bare before him. He could've killed the boy.

He damn near *did.*

Sephiroth tilts his head in acknowledgement, long hair falling in dark rivers over his shoulders. Seeing it like that… an absentminded thought about how *human* it is sends a chill down his spine.

Is that how he'd always looked at the man before? Seen his unnatural features before his natural ones?

He doesn't deserve to be called a friend.

"The two of you seem to be getting lost in your own worries. Need I remind you that *neither* of us has passed any judgment?"

That part surprises him. Angeal and Genesis stare at the man before them in shock, and he absently notes that the sun seems to frame his face *just so.* He looks almost divine, in that moment, before the silence is broken.

Sephiroth smiles at the two of them. It's small- nowhere *near* the kind Zack is able to produce- but there's something so kind about it. It reminds him of the girl who found them half dead as he tried to drag them both out of Midgar, and brought them here. "Seeing the two of you now… I'm willing to forgive you. I won't forget, of course, but…"

He pauses for a moment, glancing over to the group near the entrance. “I’ve come to learn that sometimes, it’s worth it. To forgive. Otherwise the world would be so much more lonely.”

That’s… poetic. It almost reminds him of those philosophy books he used to make the puppy read, back when he asked the *meaning* of honor. He didn't really understand it when Angeal said that it was what *you* wanted it to be. There’s obviously some other meaning in that statement, but neither of them are privy to that. They’re not his closest confidantes anymore.

When the man stands up, he holds out his hands in offering. Their second chance.

Back when they knew him, Sephiroth would barely even bother with the first. He’s grown, it seems, and they weren’t there to watch it.

Him and Genesis take the hands, being effortlessly pulled out of the flowerbed without even a single petal falling. It’s miraculous, and Angeal can’t help but stare down at it in awe. Was it always so beautiful?

A breeze brushes past his ear as he follows his friend (and they really *are* friends again, aren’t they?) over to the others.

Zack watches the three of them for a moment, before smiling. It’s mellower than the ones he remembers- his fault, most likely- but there’s still the same kindness held inside. Angeal’s comforted to see that despite everything… his student is still the same on the inside.

“I think it’s time we share some things with you two. If Seph’s

forgiven you, then I think I can too. Now, make sure to save your questions for the end. It all starts…"

The story that he hears is insane, to put it simply. Time travel? The planet? Evil aliens bent on destroying the world?

But he doesn't say that. It's clear that all of them believe it, and… it would definitely explain a lot. He remembers thinking it weird how much they knew. The strange things they were saying, back in Sephiroth's apartment.

When he says just that, Zack looks away in embarrassment. "I didn't realize you were there to hear all of *that."*

Angeal huffs a laugh. "It didn't make much sense at the time. The only reason I even heard it was because I was outside your window. No one else would've had the chance." Which is a good thing. If anyone from Shinra had caught wind of them being from the *future*… Well, it's not hard to figure out how things may have gone from there.

"That reminds me. We saw a newspaper saying that the Shinra building burned down. Do you guys know anything about that?" The woman- who looks remarkably similar to Sephiroth, now that he thinks about it- asks.

Him and Genesis look at each other. "We… weren't in our right mind. I wanted to pester Hojo into helping us, a Turk got involved, and there was a chemical spill. Whatever happened less set the building on fire and more so *blew it up."*

The genuine shock on the faces of the others is… hilarious.

The man in red (he really ought to ask their names) huffs a laugh. “I suppose that would do it.” Pausing for a moment, he then adds, “Veld, if you *really* insist on listening in you might as well come down here. We don’t bite.”

A Turk- who must be Veld- lands silently in front of them. “When Sephiroth started asking questions about you before running off to Nibelheim, I’d been a bit suspicious. Even more so when the Turks I had following those two vanished. I suppose I now know, but… How… How are you *alive,* Vincent?”

“Hojo. Now, are we in any danger of Shinra’s interference? I’d rather not, but if we must fight you we will.” Vincent (who *also* looks a lot like Sephiroth- is this his *dad?)* says, shifting his hand beneath his cloak.

Veld shakes his head. “No. After what happened to the tower, the Shinra bloodline is effectively dead. As are many of the directors. I’ve taken control of things for now. With what I’ve just heard… I ought to consult Director Tuesti on alternative power, hm?”

Sephiroth smiles. It’s surprising to him, mostly because before now all he’s seen from the man are just fleeting little things, still genuine, but not ones of pure *joy*.

The Turk looks over at the man for a moment. “I’m glad to see you like this, kid. You’ve come a long way from the last time we saw each other.”

Angeal doesn’t quite know the details, but he has no doubt that’s true.

Chapter End Notes

fun fact: originally i accidentally wrote the entire start of this chapter in sephiroth's pov bc i forgot to end the last one. that's

why it kinda reads a bit weird, and also why the other one ended somewhat abruptly.

Zack - Freedom

Chapter Summary

> The price of freedom is steep, but if you split the cost... it's not out of the question.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Despite appearances, Zack doesn't really know how to feel about how Angeal and Genesis are with them again. Don't get him wrong- he's happy that they're not falling apart on a cellular level!

It's just…

He can't help but *remember.* The things they did- that they *made* him do. The feeling of watching Angeal die because of him.

The thing about that is… they *don't.* They *can't* remember- *can't* feel guilty about it- because it never *happened.* He told them about it, sure, but for them all they can do is imagine the situation. Him and Seph are forced to remember it, again and again. All those books and movies about using time travel to fix the future never seem to consider what a *burden* it is to know things like that.

Still.

He's happy Sephiroth can be with his friends again.

Aerith smiles at him. "Penny for your thoughts?" It's quiet, so the others don't notice. Or don't want to intrude on a private conversation.

He pulls her off to the side for a moment. “You seem to have accepted knowing bits of the future so easily. How do you do it? Every time I try to let it fade into the background I just keep *thinking* about it again and again. I get that you don’t remember as much as we do so it’s probably a lot easier, but…” Trailing off, Zack glances at the ground in embarrassment. This was a stupid idea.

Pulling him out of what probably would’ve been another thought spiral he’d like to avoid, she cups his face in her hands. “Oh, Zack. Your problem is that you keep *trying* to forget. This isn’t the type of thing you can just push under the rug.”

She pauses for a moment to pull him onto a nearby bench. “I accepted it so easily because I wasn’t there. They aren’t quite *my* memories. But I think I can help you all the same. Say, is a butterfly the same thing as a caterpillar?”

Blinking in surprise at the sudden change in topic (though he figures she’s going to connect it back to her point), he shakes his head. “No. They’re a part of the same species, but pretty much everything else is different, right?” Though he thinks they still remember what they were.

“In a sense. Now, that timeline happened, didn’t it? But now things are different. They *changed.* A butterfly doesn’t just forget it was a caterpillar after spending time in the cocoon, and you won’t just forget *everything* that you experienced in that other timeline. You have to understand that these things just can’t *be* forgotten. You have to live with them, so you might as well live in harmony, right? Those things were bad, sure, but look at all the good they’ve done for you. Could *this* have happened in that future?”

Zack looks around for a moment. He sees Sephiroth smiling with his mom and dad. He sees Angeal and Genesis off to the side, watching

the conversation with interest. He sees Veld, Tseng's predecessor who vanished off the map around a year before Nibelheim.

It couldn't have happened.

Somehow, it hadn't quite hit him just how much they *changed.* The world isn't quite as hopeless. Shinra is going to be put under the control of someone with at least *some* morals. The Lifestream isn't going to be sucked dry because of *greed.*

They saved the world.

Aerith smiles at him, glowing with pride. "See? I *told* you. The world is what you make of it, so you've gotta just find the good in things. Seems that you forgot that part."

He had. Somehow, somewhere along the line, he'd forgotten the kind of positivity that first *earned* him the nickname 'puppy'. "Apparently I did. Luckily for me, I had you to put my head on right. Onto happier topics… How've you been doing?"

They sit there for a while, just… talking. He's spent so much time lately having conversations whose only purpose boils down to ' *how do we fix this'* that he honestly thinks that he *forgot* what a regular conversation felt like.

It's nice.

Zack almost doesn't notice Sephiroth's hand on his shoulder. "Zackary. It's about time we go get something to eat, isn't it? We've both had a long day, and I'm sure you'd like to take my cousin on a *date."* The

last part is said a bit forcefully, and he can't help but smile at it. Seph really is the type to get protective over someone he doesn't really know all that well, isn't he?

There wouldn't have been the chance to get to know this in the other timeline, and that's what makes it so great.

All these little things… they're *real,* now.

He could have only ever *dreamed* that Seph and Aerith got to meet. Yet here they are, *family*.

Standing up, he smiles at everyone. Yeah, he gets what she meant now. You've got to find the good in things to know that they're really worth it.

He's found plenty of good now.

Lucrecia and Vincent (it's so strange to see such a soft smile on his face) talk quietly with Elmyra.

Genesis and Angeal are talking about something to Veld. They look younger than he's ever seen them as. Was the degradation already in effect by the time he joined Shinra?

But it's gone now.

They're free.

Sephiroth and Aerith smile at him, though it looks a bit awkward on his friend. They're going to have to work on that- give him more things to smile about so that the expression becomes like breathing.

And they have the *chance* to work on that.

In the future they came from, if his friend hadn't resisted the Calamity's call… who knows what could've happened?

Well, he knows, actually. Or has the general idea. The world would end. His friend would probably have struck him down. Cloud would've… well.

There's no point in dwelling on the what-if's, anymore. They don't matter.

The past is the past, or so they say. He can't forget about it (really, his memory is shockingly good at times), but that doesn't mean he wants to.

Zack has already tried and failed that path. Aerith is the reason he knows better, which… isn't much of a surprise. She's always been the brains of the relationship. Either way. He's just gotta keep going. Live the life the Planet gave him and all that, yeah?

Man.

If you'd told his past self even a teeny bit of everything that happened he'd probably think you were insane. A part of him thinks that *he's*

insane. It’s not as though this is the most common experience.

Or a believable one.

Still. There’s a future where his parents are going to get to meet Aerith.

And it’s this one.

Chapter End Notes

one more chapter! onto the epilouge :)

Sephiroth - Epilouge

Chapter Summary

The stars record every story. The most important part is to listen.

Chapter Notes

man. it's been such a journey. i forgot how taxing yet rewarding it was to work on a long fic like this. hope yall enjoy this!

and yes i did post all the rest of the chapters at once.... got tired of waiting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sephiroth smiles, pulling his hair into a bun. It's been a while since he cut it (mostly because without the Jenova cells it was significantly harder to care for), and he honestly can't say he regrets it. Nor does he regret getting an apprenticeship under Captain Highwind.

Once it became clear that Shinra wasn't going to bother him for helping fugitives (President Tuesti had been very insistent on that, especially once some of the… nastier truths came to light), he was plenty willing to have the former Silver General working with him.

He enjoys it. Technically, he doesn't have to work a day in his life ever again. The President was very insistent that the least the company could do, after everything, was give them enough money to live comfortably until they die. But that's not the point of this- Captain Highwind (though he insists on being called Cid) would never have accepted him if it was.

No, the point was that he *wanted* to. To help work on the rocket that would bring someone into *space?* It…

There are few dreams he's ever had in his life. He might as well fulfill

them.

So President Tuesti made a few calls, though he'd insisted he could do it himself. Again, the man said it was *the least they could do.*

The Captain had been apprehensive at first, believing it to be nothing more than a flight of whimsy that the President was indulging in. Things have changed over the last year, however- he made sure of that much. He's fairly certain his love for it is obvious to even the most unobservant of people.

Which is good.

Pulling on his jacket (the late Autumn air is especially cold this year- Aerith had mentioned how the disabling of the reactors essentially kicked the planet's recovery system into overdrive), he moves to go check on his mother.

Hopefully she hasn't fallen asleep on the lawn chair again. She sleeps an awful lot, but the doctor *had* said that it would take some time for her body to adjust to being outside the crystal.

Lucreica also mentioned that she enjoyed it. Which… he supposes makes sense.

With her spending as much time in that stasis as she did, it's not much of a surprise that actual *rest* is appealing. If he were to consider himself in that situation, it would be the most optimal to rebuild his energy stores the moment he considered himself safe enough to do so.

It's plenty safe here, so when he sees her doing just that he drapes

another coat over her and continues walking.

He has somewhere else to be, after all, and he'd rather not be late.

It's almost midnight, after all.

It takes a bit of time to get there- the boy had chosen somewhere plenty remote, where the lanterns in the streets couldn't distract them. They're not the best thing to have in the background when you're trying to focus, especially this late at night.

He carefully makes his way across the dirt road, diverging from its path at the right point. Carefully making his way down the trail of slightly-flat grass, he notes that the boy was already there.

Somehow, Zack is shockingly good at being punctual.

Sephiroth smiled at the sight of his friend at the top of the hill. Zackary had asked them both to meet for some stargazing, though he figured that was just an excuse to spend time with him. That's how this usually turns out, anyways.

"Seph! Glad you made it. How's your apprenticeship with Captain Highwind? Learn anything cool yet?" The boy waves as he approaches.

Laughing, he nods. "Plenty. It's something I never quite realized I would love so much. Construction on the rocket is going well- President Tuesti said that even though I'm not a Shinra employee anymore, being on it is the least I deserve for what the company has done. He refused to take no for an answer." Even though he'd insisted

he could do it himself. It seems that Veld had chosen well in regards to a new leader. The world is prospering with someone *ethical* in charge of Shinra.

"That's good. We're burning precious time, so let's get looking for constellations, alright?" The two of them take a moment to lay down on the grass. It's still a bit wet, thanks to the light drizzle earlier in the day, but in a pleasant way. "That one looks like Shiva, don'tcha think?"

He glances at where the boy's pointing. "I suppose."

Sephiroth personally thought it looked more like an amorphous blob, but he’s never been artistically inclined. Perhaps it was abstract?

"Anything cool on your end?"

Sephiroth's eyes glide over the stars above him, and he finds something... adequate. "That collection resembles a deer, I suppose."

"Seph, " The boy whines. "We're *stargazing,* not *cloud watching."*

He chuckles, and after a moment they're both laughing. The sound is rich and wonderful, and he could almost swear the night feels warmer.

This is nice.

Chapter End Notes

and thus the end!!!!! deer symbolism.... renewal and rebirth.....

ohhh i thought i was so funny with that one.

maybe i'll revisit the world eventually. i don't have anything planned immediately like i did with Lunar Lamentations, but it's not out of the question. as long as there's a story to be told, i'll probably tell it eventually.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!